KARL BITTER

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Schevill, Ferdinand, 1868–

Karl Bitter; a biography, by Ferdinand Schevill; issued under the auspices of the National sculpture society. Chicago, Ill., The University of Chicago press [1917]

xiii, 68 p. 41 pl. (incl. front., ports.) 28cm. $2.00

1. Bitter, Karl Theodore Francis, 1867-1915. 2. National sculpture society, New York. II. Title.

Library of Congress NB237.B5S4 17—16077

KARL BITTER

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

THE BAKER & TAYLOR COMPANY
NEW YORK

THE J. K. GILL COMPANY
PORTLAND, OREGON

THE CUNNINGHAM, CURTISS & WELCH COMPANY
LOS ANGELES

THE CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON AND EDINBURGH

THE MARUZEN-KABUSHIKI-KAISHA
TOKYO, OSAKA, KYOTO, FUKUOKA, SENDAI

THE MISSION BOOK COMPANY
SHANGHAI

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1. PORTRAIT OF KARL BITTER (1912)

KARL BITTER

A BIOGRAPHY

By

FERDINAND SCHEVILL

ISSUED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF
THE NATIONAL SCULPTURE SOCIETY

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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Published June 1917
Second Impression December 1917

Composed and Printed By
The University of Chicago Press
Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.

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CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE WORKS OF KARL BITTER

(The dates indicate, as far as possible, the year of completion. The list is not exhaustive, no attempt having been made to include minor labors.)

1891. Competition Panel for the Trinity Gates.

1893. Heroic Groups for the Administration Building of the World's Fair, Chicago.

Sculptural Decorations for the Residence of C. P. Huntington, New York City.

1894. Pediment, Waiting-Room Panel, and Other Sculptures for the Pennsylvania Railroad Station, Philadelphia.

Trinity Gate, New York City.

1895. Sculptural Decorations for the Residences of George W. Vanderbilt at New York City and Biltmore, North Carolina.

1896. Three Caryatids, St. Paul Building, New York City.

1898. Statue of Dr. William Pepper, Philadelphia.

Sculptural Decorations for the Residence of Louis Stern, New York City.

1899. Fountain for Jacob H. Schiff, Seabright, New Jersey.

Battle Group for the Dewey Arch, New York City.

1900. Pulpit and Choir Rail, All Angels' Church, New York City.

Group "Peace," Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, New York City.

1901. Four Figures on the Façade of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

Mounted Standard-Bearers for the Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo.

1902. Bust of Mrs. Siedenburg, New York City.
Breckenridge Memorial Tablet, Annapolis.

1903. John Hubbard Memorial, Montpelier, Vermont.
Group in Marble for the Chamber of Commerce, New York City.
Marble Panel for the Residence of Mrs. Goodyear, Buffalo, New York.

1904. Louisiana Purchase Monument, St. Louis, Missouri.
Villard Memorial, Sleepy Hollow Cemetery on the Hudson.
Rebecca Foster Memorial, Criminal Court Building, New York City.

1905. Portrait Bust of Oliver Harriman Baby.

1906. Group for the United States Custom House, New York City.
Portrait Group of Mrs. Charles R. Crane and Boy.

1907. Equestrian Statue of General Sigel, New York City.
Tablet for Robert Ogden, New York City.

1908. West Wing Pediment, Wisconsin State Capitol, Madison.
Bust of Dr. Kiliani.
Model for Henry Hudson Statue.
Granite Groups for the First National Bank Building, Cleveland, Ohio.

1909. Fountain for Cemetery, Dayton, Ohio.
William H. Baldwin Memorial, Tuskegee, Alabama.
Four Chinese Figures, Brooklyn Art Institute.

1910. East Wing Pediment, Wisconsin State Capitol, Madison.
Memorial to Dr. Angell, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
Lords Somers and Mansfield, Statues for the County Court House, Cleveland, Ohio.

1911. Prehn Mausoleum, Passaic, New Jersey.

Bust of Mrs. Edwin Emerson.

Portrait, in Relief, of Mr. Cassatt, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Two Marble Tablets for the John Herron Art Institute, Indianapolis, Indiana.

1912. Four Groups at Foot of Dome, Wisconsin State Capitol, Madison.

Statue of Senator Dryden, Newark, New Jersey.

Diana (Statuette), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

Portrait of Mrs. H. C. Bradley, Madison, Wisconsin.

1913. Carl Schurz Memorial, New York City.

Memorial to President Tappan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Heroic Statue of Thomas Jefferson, St. Louis, Missouri.

1914. Heroic Statue of Thomas Jefferson, County Court House, Cleveland, Ohio.

Heroic Statue of Alexander Hamilton, County Court House, Cleveland, Ohio.

Fountain for John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Pocantico Hills, New York.

1915. Monument to Thomas Lowry, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Statue of President Andrew D. White, Ithaca, New York.

Statue of Thomas Jefferson, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

Kasson Memorial, Utica, New York.

Plastalina Sketch for the Depew Fountain, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Figure (Unfinished) for the Plaza Fountain, New York City.

CONCISE TABLE OF BIOGRAPHICAL DATA AND LEADING HONORS

1867, December 6. Birth at Vienna, Austria.

1889, November 22. Arrival in America.

1901, June 30. Marriage at New York City to Marie A. Schevill, of Cincinnati, Ohio. Children: Francis, b. July 22, 1902; Marietta, b. October 14, 1904; John Frederick, b. April 8, 1909.

1915, April 10. Death at New York City.

1899–1901. Director of Sculpture, Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo.

1902–4. Director of Sculpture, St. Louis World's Fair.

1912–15. Director of Sculpture, Panama-Pacific Exposition, San Francisco.

1906–8. President National Sculpture Society; also, 1914–15.

1912–15. Member of the Art Commission of New York City.

1901. Gold Medal, Fine Arts Department, Pan-American Exposition.

1904. Gold Medal, World's Fair, St. Louis.

1914. Gold Medal, Architectural League, New York.

CHAPTER I

THE WHEEL OF LIFE

Karl Bitter—public servant: in that expression may be summarized the thought of the several speakers who, on the occasion of an open session held on a May evening of 1915, tried to tell a company of assembled friends what they considered memorable in the life of the man whom blind Chance had struck down in his prime. In those addresses, largely and very properly a roll call of achievements, the fact was recalled that Bitter had been selected out of the whole body of American sculptors to take charge of the plastic decoration of the three national expositions held in America in the period of his manhood; it was recounted how inspiringly he had served the National Sculpture Society as its president; and finally, appreciative mention was made of his service to the city of New York as a member of its Art Commission. Here were types of activity which identified him with the movement of art in the United States during the last twenty years; more than with the art of America, they identified him with American life. Strange perhaps at first glance that Bitter should have come to stand for so much of what was characteristic of this continent, and yet not so strange after all. On that May evening Oswald Garrison Villard offered an interesting explanation of the profound Americanism of his friend. He said: "Coming from abroad with fresh eyes that looked beneath the surface, Bitter saw and felt things that were veiled to the multitude born to Americanism"; and Mr. Villard drew the exultant conclusion that America must be fair indeed since she bound to her service the child of another clime, "filling his heart with love for her aims and inspiring him with the very spirit and majesty of her institutions."

The speaker's words uncover the problem with which every biography of Karl Bitter will have to concern itself from the outset. This American public servant, between whom and the spirit of America there was an intimate exchange of thought, a sending

to and fro of whispered messages, was not a son of the soil. Born in Austria, he spent twenty-one years, the most formative of his life, in his Danubian homeland. Nor does that dispose of the foreign factor in his career. When, as the result of a tragic chain of circumstances, he found himself, an exile from his country, adrift on this Western continent, he did not hasten to throw off his Austrian personality like a threadbare coat. On the contrary, just as he was, with the sum of traits handed down from his ancestors and with the special tendencies and preferences absorbed in the artistic circles of Vienna, proudly and humbly at the same time, he dedicated himself to the service of his new country. And, as his life was to prove, in this fidelity to his inheritance—another form of the highest of all fidelities, the fidelity to self—there was nothing that quarreled with the genius of the community with which he merged his fortunes. For to him, as to all others who came to seek her out, free America threw wide the gates. A largeness of spirit that scorns to chaffer and bargain has been her particular glory among the nations. So Mr. Villard affirmed in his memorial address, and so scores of other sons, the poets and dreamers who have known and loved her best, have said before him. And since it has been so for many generations, and the land has waxed great because it has been great of heart, may it stand by its faith unperturbed and steadfast to the end of time!

But because Bitter came to America a grown man, shaped amid other influences, the story of his life, which the following pages will attempt to tell, must take its start in a foreign land. Everything and everybody we would understand and make our own, from the grain of wheat that supports our existence to the poet or artist who strives to give that existence a spiritual stamp, must be patiently traced to the wonder of their faint beginnings. The most amazing thing, as we go back to the youth of Karl Bitter, will be found to be how closely Bitter, the young Austrian, resembled Bitter, the mature American. The child is father of the man, and our deepest impression, as we proceed to take up the unfolding artist, will prove to be the integrity of being and the oneness of purpose exhibited from the earliest records of boyhood.

CHAPTER II

VIENNA

Karl Bitter was born in the city of Vienna on December 6, 1867. His parents were uncommonly generous in the matter of names and had him entered on the parish register as Karl Theodore Francis. When, however, some decades later, the young man took charge of his own destiny, he cast Theodore Francis overboard as superfluous flummery and was content to play his rôle in life simply as Karl.

The parents belonged to the trading middle class and, neither rich nor poor, were endowed with the sum of habits and held the familiar viewpoint characteristic of the burgher stock which, in every European country, social students are accustomed to celebrate as the backbone of the nation. Karl, who came second in a nursery row of three children, all boys, was reared with careful attention to the end that he might some day succeed to the mild but solid honors of his forbears by keeping shop like them or, in case an inscrutable Providence endowed him with the necessary headpiece, by following a reputable bread-winning profession.

The boy's mother, a faithful, plodding home-body, brought Karl up in the Catholic church and would not have been displeased if he had turned his thoughts to the priesthood. But that idea, if she ever seriously entertained it, had short legs, for Karl was about thirteen years old when he boldly announced one day that the church was a sham and that he had attended it for the last time. Perhaps this precocious skepticism came to him from his father, as his father was a Protestant and carried a faint tinge of the lawless spirit of adventure into the staid burgher ranks of the mother's family, for the father hailed from Baden in Southern Germany and had come to Vienna with a journeyman's kit on his back, a typical German *Wanderbursch* in search of a livelihood. A leaven of ambition in him made him hope that Karl would aim high, and as the boy had a natural gift of oratory and, spurred by his lively

participation in the events about him, loved to exercise it on the family circle, his father fixed his attention on the law.

But the father, too, was destined to meet with disappointment. It must have been about the time when Karl rebelled so unexpectedly against the church that he casually announced one evening to the group seated under the glow of the dining-room lamp that he was going to be an artist. An artist! To the simple burgher mind an artist is a man with an unreasonable passion for starvation, and since, as far as the family records were available, there had never appeared any such dubious member of the human race in either the father's or the mother's line, his parents wrung their hands and wagged their tongues in vexed astonishment over their son's wayward fancy. Patiently they tried to reason with his folly, and as they reasoned without avail, there gradually fell upon the growing and headstrong boy the shadow of the Black Sheep.

While this question of future occupation was being threshed out in the family circle, Karl's schooling was going on and unfortunately its developments tended to confirm the doubts concerning him which had begun to beset his parents. After attending grammar school or *Volksschule* for a few years, the boy at about the age of ten was entered at the *Gymnasium* or high school. Now, the main feature of the *Gymnasium* course was Latin, and in this subject Karl, in spite of his unusual alertness, failed to distinguish himself. Naturally it bore out the parental theory that there was a screw loose somewhere when the boy, rallied at home for his poor showing, explained that the fault lay with his teacher, who was so ugly that it hurt to look at him! What had facial deformity to do with such solemn things as duty and lessons? demanded the outraged parents; but they got no satisfaction from their perverse offspring, instinctive and pathetic champion of the very unbourgeois faith that the good is also the beautiful.

For these and similar tribulations of existence produced by lack of sympathy at home, he presently found, after the fashion of a boy artistically endowed by nature, a magical solace. Not far from his home there was a stoneyard, where for hours together he used to watch the workmen produce the figures for the tombs and

shrines of their Catholic neighbors. It was fascination enough merely to see the chips fly under the heavy mallets, but to observe a saint or an angel slowly disengage himself from the enveloping stone was to assist at a veritable miracle. One day, gulping down his fears, he stumblingly asked if he might lend a hand, and immediately so pleased the master of the yard with his eagerness that he was good-naturedly accepted as an irregular apprentice. Although the employment was for a time successfully concealed from his parents, it was at last divulged, as is bound to happen sooner or later with such escapades, and naturally precipitated another family storm.

None the less, in the end a distinct benefit resulted from the discovery of the lad's work in the stoneyard, for the father's residuum of common sense now came to the rescue and he acknowledged the uselessness of further opposition to his son's bent. To Karl's great relief he was freed from the necessity of continued painful gazing at the repulsive visage of his Latin teacher and was taken out of the *Gymnasium* to be entered in the *Kunstgewerbeschule*, the imperial school for applied arts. From this he passed, as soon as his years permitted, to the school of fine arts, the *Kunstakademie*.

From 1882 to 1887—that is, from the age of fifteen to the age of twenty—young Bitter attended successively these two art schools and probably experienced as keen a joy as has ever come to a lad who, long thwarted by circumstances, was at last free to follow the strong set of his being. In spite of the parental disapproval which, though modified in its expression, remained fundamentally unbroken, he now saw his path clear before him and for six years attended his classes with unflagging devotion. It is on record that by no means all of his teachers were pleased either with him or with his work. The old-fogey sort, identified with the pseudo-classical tradition of Canova and Thorwaldsen, reprobated a tendency in him to disregard their solemn preachments and to incline a favorable ear to the naturalist message just then once more beginning to make the round of Europe. But luckily the academy at Vienna was not wholly in the hands of the Philistines, and here and there a teacher with a fresher outlook

made bold to encourage the independent and revolutionary leanings of his talented pupil.

In any case, whatever the teachers thought and said, the virile element among the student body greatly admired the energetic and indefatigable Bitter and he, receiving and transmitting stimulus from every available source, was a center of thought and agitation, not only in the academy, but also outside its walls. For around the classrooms roared and swirled the city, the merry and vivacious capital of the Hapsburg monarchy, and a person of the keen life-hunger of young Bitter was not likely to let that fact pass unnoticed.

As it happened, Vienna was just then undergoing a significant transformation of both a physical and a moral sort. The dawn of a new era had hung its banner in the sky, and the old city by the Danube, rousing itself after long and numbing sleep, made ready to throw off its mediaeval shackles and to assume the ampler and richer, if not always the more delicate, garment of the modern age. The ancient town-wall, which had twice withstood the assault of the Turks, was razed; the grassy moat was leveled to a broad circular boulevard, the famous *Ring;* and the sites of great new public buildings, such as the Parliament, the Opera House, the Art Museum, the Burgtheater, and the City Hall, were surveyed and staked off along its course. In response to so sweeping a call architecture came to vigorous life, and sculpture and painting, not to be left behind, joined their elder sister in a concerted attempt to effect a metropolitan renovation of the city. Of course so ancient a town had an important body of artistic traditions which would very properly make themselves felt in determining the new movement. A Viennese barocco, hailing from seventeenth-century Italy, had, it is true, long since grown feeble, but none the less was still the most important single factor in the physical aspect of the city. Well suited to an expression aiming primarily at magnificence, the barocco, together with a native Gothic style much older than the Italian importation, was revived and the whole artist world summoned to participate in the adaptation of these two modes of expression to the peculiar problems of a nineteenth-century metropolis.

The sculptors of Vienna did not remain unconsulted in this building program. Their active participation fell in with the plans of the architects and, in keeping with the lively, exuberant spirit which prevailed, they designed a series of extensive decorations where animated groups crowned lofty cornices or tumbled in headlong cascades down agitated fronts. For plastic enterprises of such scope there was needed the co-operative labor of many hands working under responsible direction. Here then was a field for the pupils of the academy such as does not often open to the rising generation.

It was as an obscure assistant in the decoration of the great structures of the *Ring* that young Bitter made his public début as an artist. Of course it was apprentice-service, as, for that matter, was the case with much of the plastic output in the halcyon days of such famous centers as Athens and Florence. But if the product of Bitter and his fellow-pupils was not always the last word in art, the working shoulder to shoulder with a host of eager-eyed young men had the inestimable advantage of creating an atmosphere of zest and emulation. In visiting Vienna in after-years Bitter found much amusement in walking through the newer sections and pointing with his cane to this figure or that group as *corpora delicti* of the often more passionate than successful pursuit of his youthful ideals.

But if we may dispense with a detailed consideration of the young man's artistic contribution to the Vienna of the eighties, we must linger on two abiding effects of this early activity. First, a decorative sense, taking account of the latent harmonies among the arts and particularly as between sculpture and architecture, came to vigorous life in him, and secondly, a feeling asserted itself that the art he followed existed less for its own sake than for the living community of men, before whom it unfolded a disinterested world of beauty and whom it served perpetually to remind of ideals lifting them above the cramping squabbles of the shop and market-place. Doubtless these developments were stimulated in him because, employed on great public enterprises, he was more or less compelled to concern himself, not only with the purpose of art, but

also with the purpose of life, art's counterpart. Often marooned on a wooden scaffold high above the street level, it was the most natural thing in the world that he should let his thoughts weave to and fro between the composition under his hand and the busy community beneath his feet. What was he to these streams and ripples of traders and artisans and what relation did they and their affairs bear to his art? In bygone days, among the mediaeval townsmen, for instance, or farther back, among the Greeks, art had been a community function, its voice reaching rich and poor, the high and low, drowning the too insistent clamor of the individual self and re-arousing day by day the memory of a common good. Why should not that view of art once more gain currency and art become a sort of public service, as securely and honorably established in the esteem of men as the bench, the pulpit, and the parliament?

With his thoughts following such highly social paths, it was natural that the young art student should eagerly seek the society of his fellow-men. He had a ranging spirit that welcomed every kind of experience and fervently responded to the touch of friendship. The gay apprentices, who during the day worked together in the life-class of the academy or executed some public commission under the orders of a master, met again at night around the oaken table of their favorite bohemian restaurant and vigorously discussed the problems of their art and all the clamorous affairs of town and nation. Nights and suppers of the gods! Every young man worth his salt has passed through the period, and who shall say that the contest of fiery wits is not at least as educative as the sage and often disillusioned counsel of the academy professor? In later life Bitter, like other men who have left the expansive flutter of their student days behind them, used to look back regretfully at those meetings where the wine of youth bubbled and overflowed. Falling into a muse, he would wonder what had become of the companions who nightly with him stormed Olympus. Brave fellows! Many of them died young; others, again, foundered and went down miserably; a few, only a very few, reached port—the usual story! Bitter always kept faith with that early circle. *Semper fidelis* was a

sentiment which, though he never adopted it as a formal watchword, sounded a deep-down note of his being. He never failed, therefore, to respond royally whenever one or another of his early associates came across the sea to pay him a visit of courtesy or, a not infrequent occurrence, poor and ill and broken, knocked timidly at his door for help.

Suddenly this promising young life, or at least its outer structure, had a heavy hand laid on it and fell to earth like a house of cards. Bitter was now twenty years old and in accordance with the law of the land was drafted into the army. His friends called with him to the colors were obliged, like professional students generally in Austria and Germany, to serve one year, but he, owing to the fact that he had left the *Gymnasium* too early to get the necessary certificate attesting his professional character, was obliged to serve three years. It was a monstrous imposition, the injustice of which was recognized even by the public authorities, with no further result, however, than a helpless shrug of the shoulders. Under the circumstances the upshot might have been foreseen, for, given the resolute and dedicated spirit of the artist, it was inevitable. Bitter served one year with the colors like all the rest of his student circle; more he would not. That one year was in itself a heavy sacrifice with its perpetual drill and its enforced estrangement from the studio. Three years, he knew in the depths of his heart, would break his spirit. Faced with destruction, he did what life-loving youth will always do—he resumed command of his destiny and, renouncing his allegiance, one summer day made his way across the Austrian border into Germany.

Years before he had acquired the habit of letting his impatient thoughts roam abroad, and more particularly toward America, whenever the narrow circumstances of the burgher world about him broke him with their bit and bridle. As to thousands of other European youths, before and since, America seemed as an Island of the Blest where happier conditions prevailed than those which curved men beneath the yoke in their ancient home. America the free and untrammeled, the virgin country, seemed to beckon in his dreams so that a longing would come over him which, before he had

left the Latin school, dropped the belief into his soul that his future was cast in the New World. When, therefore, on that critical day, without spoken word to friends or parents, he bade adieu to the old city lying under the shadow of St. Stephen's tower, he knew his goal as certainly as the pilot knows his port. But, half-crazed by the agony of the immediate crisis, he tried to hide his purpose from himself and for some months wandered from town to town in Germany, seeking and often finding work. At Berlin at last, where the mental fog lifted, he got his bearings. The question now was money. A former Viennese associate, Rudolph Schwarz by name, had received him in Berlin with open arms and faithfully shared his quarters with him. Schwarz rose to the situation by emptying his purse into his friend's hand. Then at the railroad station, as a final act of devotion, he slipped his silver watch into Bitter's pocket, for the fugitive's own had been sacrificed to his necessities long before he reached the German capital. That silver watch Bitter never afterward mentioned without emotion. A stuttered word, a swift handshake, and the train pulled out of the thronged station bound for Bremen and the vast Unknown.

What thousands and thousands of treasure-seekers they have carried to the trans-Atlantic Eldorado, the fateful vessels of Europe, slipping along smoothly under white sails or tearing through the waves shaken with the rumble of great engines! Owing to the generosity of his friend, Bitter had just enough money to pay for a passage in the steerage and to provide for his first wants on his arrival. Through the long days and often through the night he stood at one spot leaning on the railing of the ship and staring out over the gray wastes of water which rocked and climbed and showed their white teeth as if to swallow him, a lonely, desolate soul adrift upon a plank. Then, as his suffering abated, he set his eyes resolutely toward the western sky. And one day, with a sob that was half a prayer, he sighted the Statue of Liberty. On November 22, 1889, he set foot on American soil.

CHAPTER III

THE LAND OF FREEDOM

A chance observer of the stream of immigrants coming down the gangplank of the S.S. "Lahn" could not have failed to be struck by the figure of a young man who, in spite of a heavy pack, moved along with an elastic step and with lively, fearless eyes took in the animated scene upon the wharf. He was in excess of six feet in height, slender but strong of build, with a curiously mobile face, deep eyes like damped-down fires, and an abundance of dark, almost southern, hair. The hands were particularly significant. Large, hirsute, and sinewy, they showed a workman's capacity to grasp a tool and swing a hammer, a sledge hammer if necessary, but at the same time the long, sensitive fingers continuing the sinuous lines of the palm conveyed the impression that their owner was of a different race from the ordinary craftsman. He was directed to a sort of military shed where, with hundreds of other immigrants dragging a miscellaneous and pathetic luggage, he awaited his turn at inspection. After what seemed an endless delay he was approached by a slouchy, blue-coated official who, having engaged in a little cursory sniffling, threw a careless thumb in the direction of the door. The immigrant had been waiting for that sign. Jauntily seizing his rough pack, he swung it to his shoulder and stepped out into the street.

Sunshine about him and brisk, sportive winds—a typical late autumn day. He made his way across Battery Park and in a moment was sucked into the roaring current of New York's central artery. He knew no soul in the New World, had no line to friends or friends of friends. He did not even command a word of the new language that from all sides beat upon his ear. None the less, an elation rose and surged within him in great waves and could not be controlled. In part it was the people, who, if they were incurious of the stranger, had an unmistakably friendly look about them;

in part it was the high buildings with their majestic, prosperous air; but, most of all, it was the inner voice whispering that the black waters had receded and that a new day had dawned for him upon the earth.

Preoccupied with his emotions, he had walked some distance up Broadway before he remembered that he had a plan. A bunk-mate on the ship had given him the address of a cheap boarding-house, something East 17th Street. Hurriedly scratched on a slip of wrapping-paper the "17" looked and was read by him as "171." With his heavy kit weighed down less by his few articles of clothing than by the tools of his sculptor's trade and his precious photographs and sketchbooks, he had plugged along for some miles, apparently without drawing nearer to his goal. At last with a sigh of relief he reached the numbered streets and, sturdily persisting in spite of weariness, got as far as Madison Square. There the hopelessness of his pedestrian undertaking came over him and he ventured to show his soiled scrap of paper to a blue-coated guardian of the traffic, who, with a scholarship unusual in his tribe, promptly solved the crumpled hieroglyph. A few minutes later the footsore traveler rested in the small cubicle of an ill-kept hostelry and pondered his next step.

At that moment, if the most grateful, he was probably also the most humble inhabitant of the Western Hemisphere. He was ready, therefore, to begin life in his new environment at the bottom of the ladder, an honest worker with two strong hands. That, by his unpretentious standards, seemed the proper start. Consequently with the aid of the landlord he copied out of the city directory, a list of decorative establishments, frankly commercial houses. During these preparations the evening had descended and he was obliged to postpone the pursuit of his fortunes to the following day. Locking himself up with a little German-English dictionary, he spent the next few hours memorizing a handy stock of English words and phrases. The happy sense of adventure which had taken possession of him when his foot first touched the pavements of New York had died down during the day, but still stirred beneath the threshold of his consciousness like distant music. As he lay

down to sleep the music mounted from the depths, breaking over him in resistless strength, and, prompt as always to translate emotion into action, he set himself three objects for the immediate future: he would find a job, an honest job no matter what; he would learn English; and as a small return for the helping hand held out to him, a homeless refugee, he would prepare himself without delay for the duties of citizenship, nay, account himself, whatever the law might be, a true and loyal subject of the United States from that hour.

The next day the same mellow sunshine, the same fresh winds—a happy augury of continued good luck. As he stepped buoyantly down the street he became aware that between him and the curving sky there was a secret bond. They were friends, old hearth-mates, confident and invincible. At the first address at which he knocked, something of this personal radiance must have slipped in through the chink ahead of him, for he had already been grumpily refused when the door opened anew and a voice, yielding to second thoughts, bade him step in. Having no English, he let his photographs and sketchbooks speak for him. Then the shop-boss cut short further argument by pointing to an angel dimly indicated in a lump of clay. The angel was to be somehow squeezed into a tympanum and had been temporarily put to one side because no one in the shop was equal to the problem. Swiftly tossing off his coat, the newcomer began work and at the end of the day was told that he might come again. What he saw about him—the kind of work which was under way, the number of men employed—informed him that he had stumbled on a prosperous firm of architectural decorators.

For one week he labored energetically, wondering whether or no he would be put on the pay-roll. Nothing had been said about money, and his understanding of the situation, directed by his European experience, was that he was being given a trial, perhaps with, perhaps without, reward. When, therefore, after six days' labor, he was, like the other employees, handed a mysterious envelope, he was pleased and grateful. Opening it timidly, he stood as a man struck dumb, for he counted, and then slowly recounted in order to make sure, forty-eight dollars. That was at the rate of

eight dollars a day! Seeking out the shop-boss, he conveyed to him that there must be some mistake, and had to have the statement repeated twice that the sum was correct before his incredulity broke down.

Walking slowly to his hotel, he mounted the four flights of stairs to his room and sat for a long time staring at the blank wall. When he roused himself, he was holding in his hand the silver watch given him at the railway station at Berlin. That night he wrote two letters, one to the friend who had sped him on his journey, the second to his parents at Vienna. It was the first time that he had permitted his thoughts to travel back over the Atlantic. The day he had landed in America and wandered on foot up Broadway he had imagined that he would wipe the past entirely from his mind and begin life as though he were just born into the world. The past had thrown him off and he would throw off the past. But was it possible? Life after all is one, and our youth is with us till we die. There were sacred and permanent, as there were slight and casual, ties among those woven by his early days, and the sacred ones he could no more renounce than he could slough off his personality. With his vigorous and disciplined hands he had in the course of one short week made a place for himself in a community that seemed to have need of him. His self-respect, crushed to earth, rose, stretched itself, and looked about. In his two letters he told with honest pride the story of the forty-eight dollars, and reached out his hands across the sea to draw to him what was his inalienable right and what he could not be without, the memories of home and friends, precious and integral elements of life.

The letters addressed and sealed, he stepped down to the office and asked to see the landlord. This gentleman was a nervous, sad-faced individual who had had some shattering experiences in his day and was not given to repose much confidence in human nature. In an access of distrust he had that very afternoon slipped an itemized memorandum under the young immigrant's door. The envelope with forty-eight dollars discreetly displayed by his taciturn and perplexing guest seemed to shake the throne of his reason. He

took his head in both his hands as if to keep it from flying off his shoulders; then, dashing to the kitchen, he shouted the sum to his wife. In a word, the good man was beside himself, and when the young stranger, having paid his bill, turned away, the amazed Boniface ran to the door and, opening it wide, bowed himself double.

Out in the street the young sculptor, yielding to the suffused contentment which had replaced his first deep emotion, let himself be drawn along by the crowd. Occasionally he looked into a lighted window, his attention caught by some object of personal adornment for which in his sudden prosperity he imagined he would have a use; in the main, he was pleased to drift and indulge a sense of fellowship with the human atoms that surged around him, for an instant emerging out of the dark and as swiftly vanishing again. These were his new countrymen with whom he was going to associate himself in their great enterprise of building up a community, politically more free, more respectful of labor, and more devotedly turned toward the realization of a high purpose than any the sun had ever shone upon.

Presently he found himself at the north end of Madison Square face to face with the statue of Farragut. Not only had he never observed it before, but he had no idea who its creator was and, had he known, he would not have been any the wiser. He stood rooted. Then slowly he walked around the bronze admiral firmly planted on both feet, breasting the strong sea-wind. The young foreigner had not yet seen work of this quality in America and, on the strength of what he had seen, was not encouraged to indulge in great expectations. But by the unimpeachable testimony of this monument the Republic was emerging from the pioneer stage and was already engaged in proclaiming, in the symbolic language of art, what it thought of itself and the world. Artistically more stirred than at any time since his arrival, he sat down on a park bench whence he could see the figure stand out impressively against the massed glow of the arc-lights.

The better to think, he closed his eyes, and, suddenly mounting from nowhere, a longing jerked at his heart. Would not someone

tell him about this statue, about the sculptor who made it and the sea captain whom it represented? Were the thousands of men and women, his new fellow-citizens, who surged up and down the great thoroughfare out of and into the dark, part of a shadowy panorama, to which his heart might go out but to which he, the spectator, was of as little concern as the paving-stones and the night air? If there were only someone of whom to ask questions, someone to whom to pour out his feelings—if he only had someone to serve as his guide among the mysteries of the new land! And suddenly a memory came back to him and a broad-shouldered, slightly stooped figure stood before his spiritual vision.

Three days before, he was working at the shop, intent on an emaciated saint, when he became aware of someone subjecting his work to a close scrutiny. He stuck to his job and presently heard a voice say cheerily, "Bravo, young man!" On wheeling round, he saw a vigorous, elderly gentleman with kindly eyes who tried to engage him in conversation. That was not easy owing to the barrier of language, but the young man had no difficulty in clearly making out that the visitor approved of both him and his work. As soon as the stranger had departed, the shop was agog with excitement. The whole force gathered round the young Viennese shouting and gesticulating. Didn't he understand? That was the architect who gave more work to the shop than all the other architects of New York put together! A very great man! And he had praised the newcomer, had said in everyone's hearing that his figures were the only ones in the whole place with any touch of distinction. And behold a miracle! The saints and angels which had hardly been noticed before were now examined from every angle and greeted with praise. Of course their creator was pleased, but better than the applause of his shopmates was the abiding impression of a pair of friendly eyes. Something had flashed from them, a warming flame, that made the young man feel sure that he had been brought face to face with one of the most notable embodiments of this New World of the West. And, source of a more subtle delight, deep down he was conscious, although he would have blushed to put it in words, that this rare

American, as manifestly an artist as he was a gentleman, possessed a spiritual substance to which he felt himself akin.

Sitting in the darkened city square ringed round with a bright electric glow, he summoned the studio scene before him and wondered whether he would ever see that benign, manly face again. It promised light and guidance as no face that he had ever met. Ever since arriving in America he had gloried in the independence of the pioneer who alone and unaided faces the Unknown. The world was the prize of the strong and resolute; life was a cup to seize and drink! But tonight in the face of the indifferent multitude gliding by and of the eloquent but uncomprehended statue, his strong will had ebbed and left him weak and helpless. He was a child again, longing with all the passion of a child for the hand and voice of a friend.

The next morning both the exaltation and the depression of the night before had evaporated, and with the rising sun life assumed its familiar, workaday aspect. For a few days there was so much to do at the shop that the young sculptor kept his thoughts glued to his task. None the less, so often did his mind stray involuntarily toward the architect that it was with an almost guilty shock that he saw the door open one afternoon and admit the object of his musings into the studio. The visitor made straight for the young Viennese and, after a renewed inspection of his work, asked for a private interview. As it was near closing-time the young man took hat and coat and walked down the street beside his new-found friend. In a kind of daze he heard the question: How would he like to work for himself in his own studio? Let him think it over for the next few days. At any rate, the famous builder did not hesitate to urge him to set up for himself, promising, in case he did so, to intrust him with the interior decorations of a great Fifth Avenue mansion in process of erection. Although the older man in his effort to make himself understood used only the simplest English words, it was long before his meaning penetrated his companion. Abruptly, to hide his great emotion, the young man wheeled about and with a hurried adieu disappeared down the street.

Behold him now established in his first studio, a small and rather bohemian affair on the East Side of the city. Here, left to his own devices, he planned and labored at the orders of his generous patron. He had traveled fast since his arrival, so fast that his confidence was active and abundant. But at times, like every conscientious workman with unsatisfied ideals, he was visited by heavy doubts. They rose like a dark cloud threatening to overwhelm him when he took in hand his first independent commission on a large scale. This was a panel with numerous figures for the ballroom of the mansion for which he had already done such minor parts as moldings and cornices. He worked at the design with even more than his usual energy, but could not somehow realize his idea. When the architect sent word that he would appear early the next morning to inspect the sketch, a panic seized him. He sat up all night and at last fell asleep over his drawing-board with the crushing consciousness that he had failed.

He was awakened by a knock, and, before he could rise from his chair, in stepped the man who had been to him, the homeless stranger, the biblical angel of mercy. Pausing at the door, he took in the scene with a smile: the crumpled hair, the sleep-ringed eyes, the darkened room with the sunlight pouring through the curtain cracks. He turned to the drawing-board and with characteristic deliberation looked over the sketch of the ballroom panel. Excellent, but more than a trifle bold! One figure in particular—he put a determined finger on it—struck him as tortuous and impossible. The next moment the young man had scaled a ladder and from its topmost rung lightly and gracefully assumed the position of the sketch. The amused visitor laughed aloud and, admitting his error, generously gave his unstinted praise to the whole design.

The profound inner relief produced by the hearty approval of a sketch which he had been convinced was a total failure caused the reticence so far observed toward his patron suddenly and completely to break down. He had treated him since their acquaintance as a kind of earthly Providence to be approached with reverent feet and bowed head. Something now moved him abruptly to speak out, and as best he could, in broken, ungrammatical sentences, he

poured forth his long-pent emotion. The old man listened with close attention. Gravely taking a seat, he pointed to another at his side. From his finely chiseled, immobile face it was difficult to make out whether or no he was pleased with his admirer. But the young man trusted his instinct and having conquered his first embarrassment frankly unburdened his spirit. He spoke above all of America, trying to convey his gratitude toward this wonderful Land of the Open Door that had raised him from the abyss and trusted him with work. Of that America he saw in his benefactor the embodied spokesman to whom he might appropriately pledge his heart's devotion. And in the rush of his feelings he told how on his first night on Western soil, after walking all the way up Broadway with an immigrant's kit, he had gone to sleep with the citizen's vow on his lips. His most ardent wish at present was to take the legal steps necessary to prepare his absorption into the United States.

There was no misunderstanding the pure passion of the dark-eyed and gesticulating foreigner. Sitting at his side, the architect gently gave him the desired information. Then reading the longing in the young man's eyes and exercising the authority conferred on him by faith, he held out his hand. "You are welcome," he said simply; "from this day you shall be one of us."

No admission to American citizenship conducted before a court of law was ever carried through more reverently than this informal act. The young stranger almost felt the chrism on his brow. After all, life had been passing kind. Here he was in his own workshop with more than enough to do, and here was a large-hearted counselor who not only led him by the hand through the maze of the New World, but also listened patiently to his youthful confessions. When he turned to take up the work of the day it was as if the air resounded with large chords such as the harpist strikes from his charmed instrument. From a boy he had always heard these chords in moments of glad uplift. Today they signified his union with the great community where he had found a home.

CHAPTER IV

STRUGGLE AND SUCCESS IN THE NEW WORLD

Karl Bitter's first studio was on East Thirteenth Street, and the architect to whom he owed his start was Richard M. Hunt.

In these swift-moving days when the greatest reputations pale with alarming rapidity, it is not easy to be just to the leader of yesterday. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century Hunt was undoubtedly a pre-eminent figure among New York architects. Of course he owed his professional authority to his work, to the imposing catalogue of his achievements, but the love and respect which he enjoyed in such ample measure throughout the city came to him from his attractive personal qualities, his vigorous manhood, his great refinement, and his devotion to the cause of beauty and the arts. His training in Paris in the period of the sumptuous transformation of that capital under the third Napoleon had given him a leaning toward expressive decorative work derived from, and in keeping with, the traditions of the Renaissance. Accordingly nothing was more natural than that the fluid line and lively gesture of young Bitter's work should catch his fancy. Hunt's structures, when he was left a free hand, called for decoration which he would wish to make abundant but which he usually was obliged to reduce to a regretful minimum owing to the difficulty of getting work of the right quality. Bitter's training and practice in Vienna had turned him out the very kind of craftsman the architect had looked for throughout his life but had only rarely found. Enthusiastically, therefore, and, in spite of years and honors, without the least condescension, he held out a hand to the groping foreigner, promising, if his product proved satisfactory, to engage him on decorative commissions almost indefinitely. As an earnest he started him on the interior of a great house on Fifth Avenue. It was an artistic partnership, though naturally the grateful and inexperienced newcomer was much less a partner than a protégé.

The situation of American sculpture at the moment when Bitter thus auspiciously began his career was an interesting one. If the sculptural production of the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century was negligible, since the Civil War and more particularly since the Centennial Exposition of 1876 rapid and gratifying progress had been made. By 1890 J. Q. A. Ward, the first native son fairly to emancipate himself from foreign tutelage, had done some of his best work, such as his Pilgrim, his Garfield, and his General Thomas; Augustus Saint-Gaudens was proudly sweeping to his zenith, and in his Farragut in New York and his Lincoln in Chicago had sounded a note of incalculable inspiration; and a whole flight of young masters, led by Daniel Chester French, Frederick MacMonnies, and Herbert Adams, had just given evidence, or else were on the point of giving evidence, that sculpture had emerged from the experimental stage and was ready to take the waters as a proud, majestic craft propelled by its own power.

It was almost as if, skipping the uncertainties of adolescence, American sculpture had arrived at a single bound at man's estate. But undoubtedly this rapid evolution had its drawbacks. Excelling in heroic statuary, nay, almost exclusively concerned with it, the native art showed the absence of many of the features which attended its more deliberate growth in older countries. Thus, to linger on one difference only, everywhere in Europe sculpture had come into existence in close dependence on architecture and for generations—and very productive generations, as it happens—had been content to serve its elder sister. Even after achieving independence in the period of the Renaissance, a considerable group of architectural sculptors continued to cultivate the old intimacy. Now this traditional European group was as good as lacking in America, its absence being a source of regret to many architects and explaining why a man with the program and taste of Hunt often felt himself seriously handicapped in his profession. No wonder that the architectural quality in Bitter's work immediately caught Hunt's eye and suggested a line of endeavor along which the young man, while serving his patron, might win notable distinction for himself.

As luck would have it, at this very juncture the whole country joined Hunt in pushing Bitter's fortunes by engaging in a national enterprise which in its artistic features was unique. The Republic had decided to hold a vast exposition in Chicago in 1893 in order to celebrate the four-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America, and the plans, prepared by the most enterprising spirits of the nation, called for a co-operative effort of the whole artist world, that is, of America's leading architects, sculptors, and painters. As soon as the project was revealed, architectural and decorative sculpture, too much neglected in the past, rose to a sudden premium. Many of the older men did not scorn to recast their artistic creed and lend a hand in the common work, but chiefly the younger men, many of them of foreign birth and because of this fact familiar with the decorative field, heard the call of opportunity and responded with alacrity. In the distribution of buildings Richard M. Hunt owed to his great name a most important commission, the Administration Building at the head of the Court of Honor. He immediately consulted with Bitter, accepted from his hands a decorative program on a scale very unusual in America, and in the next few years the two men worked out a monument destined to make their linked names heard far and wide. The Chicago World's Fair not only gave American decorative sculpture the impulse and momentum which have lasted to our own day, but it also established the young Austrian as one of the pioneers and guides of the movement.

But before proceeding farther with the Columbian Exposition it is necessary to note that long before the plans for the Administration Building were complete, Bitter's name had been projected into the art circles of New York in a very dramatic way. John Jacob Astor had left on his death a bequest for three bronze gates to adorn the oldest, or at least the most famous, of New York churches, Trinity Church on Lower Broadway. The matter was put in charge of Richard Hunt, who resolved to institute a competition open to the whole body of American sculptors. The subject given out was the representation in relief of the expulsion from paradise. Seeing an announcement of the competition in a newspaper, Bitter

resolved to take his chances with the rest of the contestants, and in March, 1891, the committee announced that the gate fronting on Broadway, the most important of the three, was awarded to the young Viennese. He had been in America sixteen months and was the youngest of the competitors, being but twenty-three years old! These rather startling circumstances did not, as may be imagined, diminish the stir which the news of the victory produced.

The winning panel told the story of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise and was, though with very substantial changes, incorporated in the completed work. This, owing to the clamorous intrusion of the World's Fair, was not ready and swung in place till three years later (1894), but since the commission was never out of Bitter's mind and occupied him more or less throughout the period, we may as well consider it at this point.

It is certain that no bronze gate has been cast for a Christian church in the last few centuries without more or less conscious imitation of Ghiberti's two masterpieces adorning the Baptistery at Florence. It may therefore be admitted at the outset that both in technique and design Bitter was affected by the Italian master. None the less his independence and self-assertion, especially in view of his youth, remain extraordinary. The sculptor of the Trinity gate is a definite personality who never descends to mere slavish imitation and who shows surprising versatility by succeeding in delicate relief work, though it was attempted by him in this gate for the first time and after an apprenticeship devoted exclusively to decorative and monumental figures. Characteristic decorative quality the gate certainly has, but it also shows, in some if not in all of the parts, painstaking and loving modeling, and thereby foreshadows possibilities which were not fully realized by the artist till a much later time.

The Trinity gate, practically rectangular in shape, consists of two doors opening in the middle. Each door bears three panels in low and high relief measuring three feet and a half in width by two feet and a half in height. The panels are framed in animated wreaths of heads and figures, delicate work not in relief but in the round. Above the gate a tympanum in stone shows Christ in

glory, having at his feet in Gothic niches the twelve apostles. The six panels in relief chiefly claim the attention of the spectator, and of the six the one depicting the Annunciation is perhaps the best. Certainly it is the simplest in design, and simplicity, in view of the almost miniature nature of such work as this, is a desideratum never to be too much emphasized. Bitter himself certainly gave preference to the Annunciation and regretted that most of the subjects, which, being assigned to him by a supervising committee of the church, were not of his choosing, hardly admitted of a simple solution. Nevertheless, the panels, generally speaking, show a courageous initiative, and the most elaborate of all, the Worship of the Elders, possesses with its sweeping circle of saints a fine, ceremonial impressiveness.

Of course the town, on the unveiling of the gate, did not rock on its foundations, though numerous journalist commentators set up a familiar clacking. "Fully equal to the Ghiberti gates and to the Randolph Rogers doors of the Capitol at Washington," wrote a glib critic less conspicuous for sound judgment than for unrelated information, while a stodgy Philadelphian, very scornful of everything he saw in New York postdating the good old colony days, confided to a home newspaper that a single glance at the new Trinity ornament convinced him that "the veriest tyro could do better." After some twenty years we may judge the work less sweepingly. Neither a Ghibertian masterpiece nor the handiwork of a dilettante, it is the honest first-fruits of a youthful talent sure to reach considerable heights, provided it chastens itself by tireless work and faithfully pursues its vision.

Meanwhile the Chicago Fair had come and gone and Bitter had furthered his reputation in connection with the Administration Building. The first bewildering impression which that structure left on the observer was that here was an amount of sculpture such as had probably never before been associated with any earthly enterprise. Countless single figures as well as groups ranging from heroic to colossal size occupied every bit of available space and left the visitor to the Exposition gasping over the sheer energy that had willed this brood of Titans into existence and swung them to their

airy pedestals. But a more deliberate inspection greatly reduced the first bewilderment and showed that these men and women, composed of an ephemeral material called staff, had each one his proper place and contributed to the general architectural effect. The fact is that Hunt with the aid of Bitter had succeeded in doing something of which he had often dreamed. He raised a building of two stories crowned by a dome plain to austerity in architectural line. But this line was so softened and the sharp transitions from story to story were so modified by means of statuary, that the building, fairly swathed, one may say, in sculpture, constituted one of the most unified and rhythmic elements of the whole Exposition. If this was decorative sculpture, it was also more than that, as the figures were not merely ornamental, but directly functional. Doubtless it was this circumstance that drew the marked attention of professional observers. *Decorative* sculpture was a thing that flourished everywhere throughout the Exposition grounds, but here was *architectural* sculpture, and it may be asserted that this branch of the glyptic art made nowhere a more convincing demonstration of its power than in the Administration Building.

Of course this comprehensive show of Bitter's art was to be judged only by the festival standards of an ephemeral occasion. Delicacy and finish were suited neither to the place nor to the material and were not present. But the great groups, though functioning primarily as architecture, were also planned to unfold a significance of their own. They told the tale of man's progress from savagery to civilization. There, for example, was Fire Uncontrolled contrasted with a group representing Fire Controlled, and so on through the remaining elements of Water, Air, and Earth. They showed thought and fancy, these various compositions, but the thought and fancy had their root in the exuberance of youth rather than in the ordered reflection of a profound philosophy, and Bitter himself was wholly pleased when his groups, after making a brave show through a summer season, were "scrapped" together with the other seven-day wonders of the brilliant White City, the first dream ever dreamt by grubbing, materialist Chicago, chiefly known till the days of the Fair—to quote the biting

apostrophe of one of her own poets—as "hog-butcher for the world."

From now on Bitter was in great demand by architects, who brought him all the orders he could fill. In the years following the World's Fair much of his time was occupied with work for the Pennsylvania Railroad Station in Philadelphia.[1] A pediment in terra cotta over the main entrance attracted a great deal of attention by reason of the same originality of thought and boldness of execution which had characterized the "element" groups at Chicago. It represented Fire and Water tamed and harnessed to the service of Man—certainly a theme eminently appropriate to a railway station—while an enormous panel in the waiting-room treated of Transportation in historical perspective. Allegory had not prospered greatly in America, perhaps because its didactic generalizations create something of distaste in an impatient, practical people like ourselves, and if these allegories of Bitter's made a great deal of a stir when they were placed, it was due to their sheer novelty rather than to the pleased response of the national spirit. But even the novelty did not last long, because, if the truth be told, the allegories lacked intrinsic worth. They were unmistakably youthful, an experiment rather than a last word, and the progress of art before long overtook them as did Bitter himself.

As it is out of the question to name, much less to consider in detail, the numerous works turned out by Bitter in the period following the Chicago Fair, we must content ourselves with selection, and proceeding on this plan we will group together certain commissions executed for the winter residences and summer villas called forth in generous abundance by that era of industrial expansion. These commissions came to him through Hunt and other architects attracted to his work and belonged decidedly to the realm of decoration. What gave them their vogue—and they had a great deal of vogue—was a certain "go" manifested in a fluid silhouette and a swift impressionist execution. We may think of them as youthful

[1] To give an idea of the amount of this work for the Pennsylvania station I shall list the separate objects: pediment in terra cotta (50 feet in length), panel in waiting-room (30 feet in length), two heroic figures supporting clock, two smaller pediments, ten panels celebrating each one an event in the history of an important city along the Pennsylvania Lines.

work, in a sense even as commercial work, on the understanding that they were never mercenary, for Bitter carried through even this somewhat wholesale production, much of it in the light vein of pure entertainment, with scrupulous artistic honesty. The best of it is housed by Biltmore, the great North Carolina mansion of G. W. Vanderbilt. Here, under the encouraging eyes of a modern Maccenas, the young man executed, in addition to an assortment of friezes in stone and oak, a number of things which owed their very considerable effect to a combination of inner vigor and environmental atmosphere. Among them figure a pair of andirons, a fountain group representing a boy stealing geese, and two mediaeval warrior-saints, St. Louis and Joan of Arc. These several productions not only show the delicacy of touch and spirit which the artist was able to communicate whenever he considered that the problem demanded them, but they also exhibit a wide range of artistic inspiration, for the andirons suggest Cellini and the Italian Renaissance, the two French saints have a distinct mediaeval touch, and the goose-boy is a bit of delightfully animated naturalism of a modern type. The young man who executed these several works plainly had not yet found himself, but was ranging far and trying many schools in a tireless search for his own individual style.

If Bitter welcomed these Biltmore commissions because they broadened his experience and kept him from falling into a too exclusive decorative rut, he seized with nothing less than avidity the first opportunity that came to him to make trial of a public statue. Let us recall in this connection that by the somewhat narrow standards prevailing among us at that time public statues and public statues alone were considered the test of a sculptor's ability. As it happened, a group of admirers wished to commemorate Provost Pepper on his retirement from the headship of the University of Pennsylvania and after some hesitation picked Bitter for the work (1896). Elated over the commission, the artist slaved hard at it for several seasons. When it was done, the dignified official, bareheaded and swathed in the ample folds of an academic gown, was seen seated in a chair of state lost in meditation. But his is not

the self-erasure of the religious meditation of the East. A characteristic son of the West, the provost resorts to reflection only in order the more resolutely to resume a habitual activity. The contracted brow, the firm jaw, the clenched right fist, the position of the feet, indicate that the fires of thought burn within and that, breaking bounds, they will presently lift the seated figure from the chair to its full length with a fulminating message. Head and hands are admirably expressive, and if their nervous energy seems a bit excessive in a mere pedagogue, we should remember that energy was the property which Bitter had encountered on highway and byway in America and which appealed to him as the superlative American trait. The statue thus has a double significance. While it is a portrait representing a definite personality in a characteristic pose, it is also a symbol, for it is *the* American of the last decade of the nineteenth century as seen by a fresh-visioned foreigner. The bronze provost was the best thing Bitter had so far done; one does not go far wrong in calling it the apex of his achievement in the first or experimental period of his development.

The many architects to whom Bitter had become united in bonds of amity were not minded to let their collaborator slip without protest into the ranks of the monumental sculptors. Richard Hunt indeed, his first friend and protector, had died in 1895, but other architects, more particularly George B. Post and Frank Furness, who had entered into relations with him almost as soon as Hunt, continued to solicit his support for their undertakings. This prolonged popularity with the building profession produced gradually an organization of his work which is not without passing interest. We found Bitter established as early as 1890 in his first studio on East Thirteenth Street. He did not stay there long. As the orders flowed in, he needed more elbow-room, and took a house on East Fifty-third Street with a studio on the ground floor. But the neighborhood was noisy and unattractive, and, on the lookout for quiet, he took in 1896 the decisive step of abandoning New York altogether in favor of a suburban site on the Jersey cliffs at Weehawken. To an unsympathetic observer chancing upon these successive studios they may have had something of a factory aspect, but,

viewed in a spirit of friendliness, they never failed to impress the visitor as an interesting type of effective organization applied to plastic ornament. In this organization Bitter himself was of course the hub, the center, for he acted as designer, modeler, and superintendent, while a body of assistants, whose number varied with the commissions in hand, made plaster casts, roughed out the clay figures, and executed his designs in marble or granite, besides doing the hundred and one things required in so active an establishment. Bitter's youthful and regulated energy delighted in riding the hurly-burly loosed about him. He dominated the scene like a field-marshal, saw to it that everybody did his part, and kept the good will of the architects and patrons, not only by never declining from his standards, but also by delivering his work with business-like promptness at the exact time it was contracted for.

The steady stream of marbles, bronzes, reliefs, and friezes issuing from those three studios is remarkable. It need not detain us further, since the most expressive pieces have already been enumerated. But this much is certain and calls for notice: the systematized production in a large workshop, as well as the range and quantity of work which Bitter put out, made him, whether he would or no, what his colleagues called a decorative sculptor. They irked him often with the excessive emphasis they laid on the qualifying adjective, for he had no desire to be tagged and pigeonholed and deprived of his freedom of movement. It is probable that his special enthusiasm for the Pepper monument was kindled by the thought that it signified a sort of declaration of independence. But however clear he made it that he wished to keep a path open to another development, the fact remained that he was at this time what he was called, a decorative sculptor. But what of it? The decorative ideal was neither disgraceful nor inartistic, and, as it happened, a great building era having burst upon America, decorative sculpture was in universal demand. That, being called for, it should be done by artists rather than by gravestone establishments admitted of no dispute. None the less the American tradition looked askance at the dependence of sculpture on architecture, and a certain group of hyperaesthetes in and outside the studios did not

scruple to visit all decorative sculpture with contempt on the mere ground that it was decorative. Bitter might sigh over this narrowness, but courageously went about his business, and that means that for many years—until a period to be noted in due time—he conducted what was, if never exclusively, at least primarily, a workshop for decorative and architectural sculpture. It is therefore proper before pursuing his further development to show by a few examples how his skill and understanding of this kind of work steadily grew and deepened.

On the front of the St. Paul Building on Lower Broadway will be found three colossal caryatids in stone representing the White, the Negro, and the Malay races (1896). They are not casual features of the façade, but integral elements, the bodies with their heavily accented, straining muscles being actually engaged in upholding the great superimposed mass. Even better are the four statues on the Fifth Avenue side of the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Arts (1899). They represent Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, and Music and, while simple and powerful, are at the same time full of liquid grace. In these figures Bitter, imitating no school, dared to be modern, and expressed himself with such charm and ease that we may fairly say he set a crown upon ten years' persistent application to the decorative division of his art.

Because of its connection with a stirring period of our national history the sculptor's share in the Dewey Arch must be recorded at this point. Admiral Dewey, the hero of the battle of Manila, was expected back in the United States in the autumn of 1899. In order to give the occasion a certain dignity, to make it in fact a sort of Roman triumph, the city of New York resolved to honor the admiral with an official reception; and the National Sculpture Society, not to be remiss, requested the city fathers for permission to participate in the celebration with a triumphal arch for which the members of the Society were to donate their services. The offer was accepted and Bitter was one of the sculptors who volunteered for the work. Though it was hastily erected of perishable materials, New York still remembers that monument, which stood on Fifth Avenue and Madison Square. And Bitter's contribution

to the handsome improvisation has not been entirely forgotten. It consisted of a naval group representing a gun-crew in action. Placed against the right pier of the arch, it flashed the spirit of battle and was instinct with the very movement of life.

However, what touched Bitter more than the applause which greeted his battle group was the occasion itself; for he had participated with the leaders of his profession in raising a monument which was a free gift to the nation. Exactly ten years had passed since his arrival in America. In those ten years he had achieved what by ordinary human standards may be called a remarkable success. But success and the physical comforts attending it had never extinguished the flame of idealist enthusiasm which America had lighted in his heart when he arrived upon its shores, a bruised and way-worn fugitive. For years he had cherished the thought that he would repay his debt, repay as an artist can and must, in art, for art, too, like war and politics and education, was a form of social service. Swayed by such ideas, no wonder that he derived deep comfort from his share in the Dewey Arch. For not only had his fellow-sculptors appointed him one of their official representatives in an undertaking of national scope, but his American citizenship, affirmed by service, admitted of no further question.

CHAPTER V

THE PAN-AMERICAN EXPOSITION: CLIMAX AND END OF THE DECORATIVE PERIOD

In order to celebrate the growing intimacy of the nations of the Western Hemisphere, the city of Buffalo planned for the year 1901 a great exposition, smaller than the Chicago Fair of 1893 but artistically, if possible, superior to it. In the course of the preliminary discussions the responsible committee of citizens saw the desirability of drawing a sculptor into their conferences and very properly appealed to the National Sculpture Society to delegate one of its members for the task. After thoroughly canvassing the situation the Society named Karl Bitter, who, almost from its inception in 1893, had figured prominently in its affairs.

While the appointment meant that in the opinion of his colleagues Bitter possessed the particular gifts of hand and character needed for a most delicate and important undertaking, it also signified that decorative sculpture, the cause for which Bitter had consistently fought, had come into its own and was honored in his person with responsible participation in an enterprise of national scope. Finally, the appointment had a personal and intimate significance since, much as in the case of the Dewey Arch, the new honor could fairly be interpreted as a patent of citizenship from his guild brothers, presumably better qualified than any other American group to pronounce judgment on this foreign-born recruit. Bitter was now thirty-two years old. After an active struggle of ten years in his adopted country, he was intrusted with a task of artistic leadership which outstripped his boldest dreams.

Mr. John G. Milburn, of Buffalo, a leading member of the committee responsible for the Pan-American Exposition, has thus recorded his impression of Bitter in the days when the project was taking shape in the busy give-and-take of official and unofficial conferences: "With an inspiration that captured the Board of Architects Bitter conceived and developed a scheme of sculpture

beginning at the entrance and ending at the tower, which unfolded and illustrated the plan, purposes, and objects of the Exposition, not as a miscellaneous mass of buildings and exhibits, but as an inherent revelation of the development and various forms of energy and activity of the Western Hemisphere."[1]

And Bitter himself has left a very detailed description of his plan,[2] from which it is plain that Mr. Milburn correctly caught his meaning and that he aimed, above all, at an organic composition. Accordingly, he developed a sculptural scheme which, while fully expressing the underlying idea of the Exposition, was intended to realize a significant, beautiful, and harmonized decoration. The execution of the various parts he left to the co-operating sculptors, who were expected to assume full responsibility for their respective contributions. For, be it understood, if Bitter was the director, the completed work was to be nothing less than the evidence, spread before the country, of the level of achievement reached by the brotherhood of sculptors in America at the dawn of the twentieth century.

If, putting ourselves in the director's position, we now proceed to inquire what was the scheme worked out by the architects and submitted to Bitter for decorative treatment, we discover that there were buildings in groups around majestic courts and along splendid thoroughfares, and that while some served to display the resources of Nature, such as forest and mineral wealth, others celebrated Man in respect of his moral and social development, and still others proclaimed Man's inventive genius, by virtue of which he has attacked the rich stores of Nature and reduced them to his service. Thus there were three main architectural groups, and in order to echo and reaffirm the meaning inherent in each of them Bitter provided as a central feature in each group a fountain, to wit, a fountain of Nature, a fountain of Man, and, most sumptuous of all, a Court of Fountains, lined by buildings celebrating the progress of invention and dedicated respectively to Transportation, Machinery, Electricity, and the cognate fields. Each fountain commanded appropriate sculptural accessories ranged about its basin and was in effect a story-book with a lively appeal to the imagination of

[1] Memorial address, May 5, 1915, p. 11.

[2] *The Criterion*, May, 1901.

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whosoever stopped to turn its pages. The three story-books together told in ordered progression the tale of how man has traveled toilfully but triumphantly from savagery to civilization.

So much for Bitter's plan. Of course there were disappointments: the limited funds necessitated certain omissions, some of the best artists were, for one reason or another, unable to participate, and several of the participants turned in discouragingly mediocre work. Against these drawbacks were mustered a number of notable advantages. When the gates were opened, there, planted over the grounds, was a display of several hundred original figures contributed by a fairly representative group of sculptors and affording an excellent picture of the status of American art, and, what was best of all because constituting the real object sought, the figures composed themselves into an artistic decoration attuned to the buildings and rehearsing before the visitors the heroic drama of man's struggle upon earth.

Access to the main grounds was by a Monumental Bridge which was planned to typify the just pride of the American people in their national achievements and to sound, as it were, a loud fanfare of welcome to the visiting holiday thousands. The Bridge was dominated by four imposing piers crowned by mounted Standard-Bearers and these Standard-Bearers were the individual feature in the general scheme which Bitter reserved to himself. The towering, erect riders, triumphantly clasping their banners and waving them aloft in lordly unconcern of their wildly ramping steeds, were not only a fine decoration, but conveyed an almost uncanny impression of controlled power. According to Mr. Milburn no less a judge than Saint-Gaudens declared that the Standard-Bearers were the best product of the sculptor's art within the confines of the Exposition.

Mr. Milburn, whom we have quoted on the general plan, also affords a personal glimpse of the director in action which deserves to be reproduced because it helps us to realize some of the traits of character which gave Bitter such authority among his fellow-workers: "All this was a great undertaking and it occupied the best part of two years of his life. Upon him devolved the selection of his collaborators, a duty which he discharged with infinite tact,

absolute fairness, and a thorough knowledge and appreciation of the men selected. Then there was the supervision of the work as it proceeded, the superintendence of the enlargement of the models, and the placing of the finished works in position. When we remember that there were more than five hundred of these productions, the magnitude of the task is apparent. Moreover, it had all to be done on time, and, if the individual artist is inclined to be careless of the passage of weeks and months, what must have been the worry over an army of them!

"I wish I had words to convey our admiration and respect for him. His devotion and loyalty never faltered. No emergency daunted him; no amount of labor staggered him. His zeal and energy and courage never flagged and he was a tower of strength to us from beginning to end."

A last quotation will show how this Buffalo citizen, supposed to be chiefly expert in figures, delicately fathomed the spirit of the artist: "Bitter lived his life on a high plane and the world was to him a very serious place, almost to the degree of austerity. But with those qualities there was such sweetness of nature and courtesy and broad-mindedness that intercourse with him was as delightful as it was elevating."[1]

The opening of the Buffalo Exposition in May, 1901, was a brilliant ceremony and brought the director of sculpture much generous public recognition. He had climbed a height and now might take a well-earned rest before girding his loins for a new undertaking. He could not more appropriately have marked the temporary end of the uphill struggle of life than he did when on June 30, 1901, he married a woman of a spirit and outlook closely akin to his own. The event took place in New York at the Unitarian Church on Fourth Avenue. The simple ceremony over, the artist yielded to a longing inevitable in the light of his origin and took his bride to Europe. During a long summer spent largely bicycling over the ribbony roads of France and wandering on foot among the giants of the Alps, he laid up a plentiful store of bright memories and rich impressions. Into Austria, where a grim penalty for desertion

[1] Memorial address, May 5, 1915, p. 12.

from the army lay in wait for him, he did not venture, but he met his family and friends outside the Austrian border, and thus successfully knit up the unhappy, unforgotten past with the prosperous present. On their return husband and wife established themselves at Weehawken, where Bitter had already sojourned as a bachelor since 1896.

The home at Weehawken henceforth constituted a tender and significant element in the web of his life. To the average individual the piece of earth he calls his own is likely to acquire something of a sacred character, and Bitter in all matters of our common destiny was very much like other men. None the less, if the plot of ground at Weehawken was an abiding-place, it was more than that too. It hung over the river like an eyrie, or, since an eyrie is a lonely mountain rock amid the snows, let us say that it was a platform lifted above the welter of New York without being detached from it. In any case the platform was high enough to be swept by the free winds of heaven and to give the illusion of being near to the coursing sun and moon and stars.

Bitter's piece of ground was about two hundred feet long and from sixty to eighty feet in depth. It lay in the exact axis of Forty-fourth Street, plainly discernible across the river as a line cutting New York into two halves as with a knife. At the foot of the cliffs, which made a sheer plunge of two hundred and seventy feet, rolled the proud and sparkling Hudson, crowded at all hours of the day and seasons of the year with puffing tugs and lumbering ferries. Beyond the river, as far as the eye could see, stretched the vast island of Manhattan, close-built with houses, factories, and skyscrapers and magically hung with an ever-changing curtain woven of mist and sunlight. To reside on the Jersey palisades was a delight, but it was also a call to earnest living. It constantly revived the thought that the life of man has no meaning except in relation to the total effort of his fellows and that all who dwell on earth are held in the close embrace of God.

For the sake of privacy Bitter surrounded his place on the street side with a high wall, and, planting his house on the northern end of the inclosure, he built up his business quarters, consisting of studio, stable, and stoneyard, at the southern end. That left the

considerable space between house and studio to be developed as a garden. The studio was elaborated from a famous suburban restaurant which had stood on this spot before he purchased it and which, reconstructed with an eye to sculptural necessities, was fitted with iron joists and pulleys capable of handling even the heaviest blocks of stone. Although the studio was as large as a church, it did not exhaust the business space at Bitter's disposal, for under the same roof was a small private studio, and on either side of the entrance to the studio from the garden stood a low, circular tower with a room in each available for storing casts, or housing an assistant, or for any other of the many purposes of a busy establishment.

The stable, which adjoined the studio at right angles, usually contained an excellent horse or two, evidence of Bitter's great attachment to this animal. His love of riding, brought from the old country, was so great that for years after his arrival in New York he took his exercise chiefly on horseback and at one time even joined a riding-club which aspired, not only to elegance, but to the gaits and figures of the *haute école!* After his marriage, indeed, the wild dashes through the Park and over the country roads of Westchester gradually lapsed into memories, but from time to time he still rode until he found a more social use for his horse by hitching him to the runabout and bowling his wife and, later, his children over the glorious boulevard that crowns the Jersey palisades.

It remains to speak of the garden and the house. The garden was a green delight of box-hedges and shrubbery among winding gravel walks and was adorned by one of his own fountains, the Boy with the Stolen Geese.[1] Its formalism, suggesting order without stiffness, was characteristic of the man who always frankly avowed a strong kinship with the eighteenth century. Bitter was fond of his garden and loved to sit in it at evening gazing over toward New York which at that magic hour flushed like a great rose or glimmered like a wall of pearl. But it is more than doubtful if he ever cared for the garden as he did for the house. On this, anchored with endless difficulties in the bedrock half a hundred feet below the street-level, he had bestowed his close attention with the result that

[1] Original at Biltmore.

visitors, whether they were pleased or displeased with what they saw, proclaimed it at least unique.

The kitchen and servants' quarters, apparently excavated out of the living rock, had windows only toward the river, and were as far removed as was physically possible from the dining-room, which, directly under the roof, had full command of the view. The housekeeping difficulties involved in this unusual separation of interdependent parts were largely overcome by means of a dumb-waiter. Between kitchen and dining-room lay the living-room, the central feature of the house to which everything else was subordinate. The whole east or river wall was converted into a vast window and in the center stood or rather dominated a large monument which sounded the formal, sculptural note the owner loved. I am referring to a full-size plaster cast of Germain Pilon's famous group of the Three Graces. Although the bookcases, tables, chairs, piano, and other appurtenances of modern living somewhat toned down the monumental character of the place to the level of daily comfortable existence, it was not easy in the presence of those solemn goddesses to sink into a vulgar frivolity. And gaiety, a contained gaiety which never passed the bounds of good breeding, became the characteristic atmosphere of that living-room. The three grave ladies imposed it and the living master added his silent approval.

At the side of the main structure containing kitchen, dining-room, and living-room rose a square tower with several bedrooms on different levels, each affording a magnificent view either up or down the river. The quaint combination of various elements in house and studio gave the two buildings from whatever angle they were viewed an unusual look. Seen from the shore below or from the platform of the river ferry, they silhouetted themselves boldly against the sky and on a moonlit night started romantic memories of castles seen along the Rhine or Danube.

In July, 1902, the birth of a son filled Bitter with deep satisfaction. The triangle of father, mother, and child suddenly became to him one of the fundamental patterns of existence. Being the man he was, he was certain, sooner or later, to realize all these new and moving experiences of family and home in his chosen art.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW CENTURY: NEW AIMS AND OLD RESPONSIBILITIES

That the new century would bring a new period in Bitter's work was indicated by many signs. First, his long service as a decorative sculptor had been brought to a fitting close at the Pan-American Exposition; secondly, his marriage had given him a new outlook and showered upon him a multitude of fresh interests; and, finally and most important of all, he was slipping into the serener waters of ripened manhood and wished, as every artist must wish, to crown the years of experimentation with his own inevitable and individual expression.

Those colleagues and acquaintances who judged him on general evidence to be a gay cavalier, a deft artisan, and an energetic organizer who had already given the full measure of his ability were in for a considerable surprise. Boon companion and clever workman he was indeed, but, what did not appear in the hurried touch-and-go of metropolitan existence and was therefore unguessed by all but his intimate associates, he was also an artist with an unslaked thirst and a philosophic view of man's destiny that was constantly enriched by thought and reading and was serious to the point of austerity.

The first step on the new road opening before him in the new century was to reorganize his studio. It had been accommodated to the demands of a flourishing decorative establishment fairly flooded with orders and often enough presented the appearance more of an industrial battlefield than of the retreat of an artist. One after another the helpers were dismissed and further decorative orders, especially if they carried the unsavory odor of commercialism, rigorously refused. It was an unspeakable luxury to find himself, after many years, alone in his spacious workshop, and in the spiritual relief which he experienced (for it was, above all, the spirit which was unburdened) he often enthusiastically exclaimed that he would never again admit as much as an apprentice to his privacy or let any hand but his own see his productions through to

the end. Of course this was extravagance, and the time came when he again employed an assistant or two like other sculptors, but the factory character of the decorative period was gone from his shop forever, having been displaced by the sober atmosphere congenial to the man who tempers energy with meditation.

It was an interesting question how far the public, whose favor he had enjoyed in increasing measure, would understand and accept the new phase. Modern life is so much an affair of specialization that people almost resent as an affront an artist's departure from a familiar style and method. Though in Bitter's case there was nothing so serious (or laughable) as resentment, there was plentiful evidence of lack of confidence, and the orders, which had thus far been numerous to the point of embarrassment, suddenly ceased. Then, just as he was preparing, not to give up the battle—anything rather than that—but to scale down his manner of living to a contracted income, he received a commission exactly after his heart.

The death of Henry Villard, who had been an important figure in the astonishing economic development of America in the period after the Civil War, had filled his family with the strong desire to perpetuate his memory in some suitable way. To Bitter's new vision the usual portrait statue seemed a somewhat crude and certainly an overworked device, and he persuaded the family to commemorate the idea which dominated the life of the deceased rather than to reproduce with meticulous realism his human and ephemeral features. The plan, enforced by a hurried sketch, was adopted by the Villard family and, after many changes in detail and the emotional ups and downs inevitably connected with a novel venture, culminated in the marble monument now in the cemetery at Sleepy Hollow on the Hudson.

A smith—type of all craftsmen from the far-off days of Tubal—has let his hammer fall to the ground and is resting on his anvil. His day's work is ended and he is weary—or can it be that his life's work is ended and he has heard the whispered call from afar? His head is thrown back and he is looking up at the sky with an expression in which hope, surprise, and question mix and blend. What is this mysterious Death that interrupts our work? the smith asks

of the stars, but gets no answer other than the one the poet Goethe heard: *Wir heissen Euch hoffen!* ("We bid ye hope!")

The Hubbard Memorial at Montpelier, Vermont, also concerned with death, represents a gentler mood, being much more softly melodious than the Villard monument. An occasional critic has suggested that the single draped figure of the Hubbard Memorial was inspired by Saint-Gaudens' famous Sybil (often called Grief) at Washington, but a close comparison of the two works will effectively dispel the idea of their relationship. The Sybil is a unique work of art and looks out on the spectator, when after long search he confronts her in her woodland retreat, with a tragic intensity inspiring awe and fear. Bitter's angel of the Hubbard Memorial is not remotely of the same kin. It is a lyric figure, half angel and half bird, announcing by its rhythmic lines and every fold of its wide robe that Death is the simple, natural conclusion of existence and visits mortals on the wings of music. In so far as there was an inspiration for the figure outside the artist's consciousness it may be found in the lines of Bryant's "Thanatopsis" appropriately inscribed on the exedra which forms the background of the monument:

> . . . . sustained and soothed
> By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave
> Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
> About him and lies down to pleasant dreams.

Still another memorial of this period is in the Criminal Court of New York City and celebrates Rebecca Foster, widely known and honored as "the Tombs' Angel," because of her humanitarian services among youthful transgressors swept into court from the city streets. The marble plaque in medium relief shows a winged angel who has come from behind unawares and is whispering the message of hope and charity to a boy fallen by the wayside. At the words the mask of evil which the boy has worn falls as by magic from his face. The upturned eyes see for the first time and the half-open, innocent lips proclaim that the mouth, stubbornly closed so long, has been unsealed by the warm touch of love. In a composition wholly idealistic the portrait of the real Rebecca

Foster, inserted, medallion-wise, at the top of the frame, is a jarring note. It represents an unhappy concession which Bitter was obliged to make in order not to offend some of the too literal friends of the brave woman who certainly showed that she was anything but literal in her championship of the youthful victims of the disorders of our cities.

That he had no objection to realistic portraiture wherever it was in place is shown by the charming group of Mrs. C. R. Crane and Boy—in a rose-flushed block of marble, by the way, such as comes upon the market only now and then—and by the equestrian statue of General Franz Sigel. The Sigel statue occupied him for several years and only slowly and after the most scrupulous attention to every detail of rider and horse assumed the shape which met the public's gaze on the occasion of the unveiling in October, 1907.

It is written that every sculptor worth his salt desires to do an equestrian statue before he dies, and Bitter was no exception to the rule. Certain German societies, wishing to place before the people of their blood as an example to be emulated a compatriot who had risen to high command in the service of the United States, sponsored the plan of raising a monument to General Sigel. Unfortunately the money collected was not sufficient for a memorial such as Bitter considered worthy, but rather than refuse a commission which stirred his energies to their depths and had something of a public character, he contributed his time and that of his assistants for little or nothing. It was highly characteristic that, having once made up his mind to suffer the financial loss, he never again referred to it.

The statue in bronze is admirably placed where One Hundred and Sixth Street meets Riverside Drive, and from its lofty pedestal of granite towers magnificently over both Drive and river. There are some famous equestrian statues in the world, but very, very many—the expression is hardly too strong—infamous ones. Among the countless hazards in the path of the equestrian sculptor, the most perilous perhaps lies in the fact that if he places his horse fairly on four legs, he gets an animal without life; and if he sets it prancing he is threatened with the other horn of the dilemma in the

form of a restless composition in precarious equilibrium. Bitter straddled the issue in an interesting way. He secured solidity by having his horse stand, as a sensible horse respectful of the equine decencies should, on all fours, but at the same time he instilled the necessary life into his animal by choosing that moment for representation when the general has just reined in his steed after dashing up to see his men file by in review. The just completed exertion still quivers in every nerve and muscle of the animal, while the rider, with body taut as a bowstring and almost erect in the stirrups, gazes earnestly and confidently at his passing troops. Brown's Washington and Saint-Gaudens' General Sherman are equestrian monuments of which New York may well be proud; it is certain that the city need not be ashamed of the horse and rider whom Bitter wrought and who are one of the landmarks of its finest thoroughfare.

Long before the Sigel was set in place an event had come and gone which re-established Bitter's connection with his decorative past. In the year 1904 the city of St. Louis was appropriately chosen as the site of a National Exposition held to celebrate the centenary of the purchase from France of the vast territory of Louisiana. The event had occurred when Thomas Jefferson was President of the United States and Napoleon Bonaparte chief executive of France. As soon as the members of the local committee came to discuss the Exposition plans they resolved to call in Bitter as their plastic expert. So great was the authority won by him on the occasion of the Buffalo Fair that he appeared immediately as the "logical" head for sculpture at St. Louis, and though he was very loath again to exchange his hard-won privacy for the dust and tumult of what was substantially a public office, he yielded to repeated solicitations and once more resumed the responsibilities of director, which involved nothing less than the temporary command of the whole army of sculptors in America.

The foremost consideration with him at St. Louis as at Buffalo was that architecture and sculpture must co-operate to produce a harmonious composition. At the same time the plastic decoration was to have a firm unity of its own. If at Buffalo, as the reader

may remember, this unity was obtained by relating the whole decorative undertaking to the concepts Man and Nature, the plan of St. Louis was to have all the sculpture reflect some phase of the Winning of the West. It is hardly necessary to go into the details of Bitter's plan, as his procedure on a similar occasion has already been narrated. Suffice it that the Winning of the West, interpreted in a broad, historic sense, included within its generous embrace Spanish conquistadores like De Soto, French missionaries and explorers like Joliet and LaSalle, stirring memories of the Red man and his enemy, the pioneer, the gradual creation of a proud array of fourteen states, and, of course, the fortunate treaty by which the United States acquired title to the vast dominion of Louisiana and from which the Fair itself was named. To follow the sweeping sculptural display at the St. Louis Fair with a seeing eye and mind was to make an ennobling excursion into one of the greatest chapters of American history.

Bitter's personal contribution consisted of the decoration of the great shaft commemorating the Purchase treaty. The shaft was crowned by a Peace waving the olive branch to the nations of the world. At the base there were female figures representing the Mississippi and Missouri, the leading waterways of the purchased territory. Seated astride the prow of a canoe, they were instinct with youth and fairly shouted their love of enterprise and daring. After a single jubilant summer of existence, the two river deities together with the Peace and shaft were, like all the other short-lived wonders of the Fair, swept into the dustbins of Time. Only the tablet which appeared upon the face of the shaft escaped that fate by virtue, we may confidently affirm, of its admirable pertinency. It represented the signing of the Louisiana Treaty, the very act, a composition of three figures of whom two, Livingstone and Monroe, were Americans, and one, Marbois, a Frenchman. At the close of the Exposition this plaque was ordered for the city of St. Louis and, cast in bronze, may now be seen—together with a Jefferson, of whom more anon—in the Jefferson Memorial Building which, in the years following the Fair, the commissioners erected on the Fair grounds as a perpetual memento of the peaceful concourse of the

nations of the world in the prosperous city named for the French warrior-saint.

The permanent bronze tablet was modeled after the original in staff, but represents an improvement in at least a score of delicate details. The central figure of the scene is Livingstone, who alone, as recent investigation proves, with as good as no help from his colleague, Monroe, supplied the energy and idealism responsible for this greatest of American diplomatic victories. He is seated and with folded hands is looking into the future, seeing, like the patriotic visionary he was, the happy results of this negotiation for the American people. Behind him, in dandified indifference, stands Monroe, and before him, in the breathless act of signing in the name of France, the amiable Marbois, long-time friend of the young trans-Atlantic republic. Although each figure is strikingly individualized, they all have in common a certain eighteenth-century elegance and are bound together into a compact and dramatic composition. The details contribute each its harmonious note, particularly the many-branched candelabrum on the table and the charming, old-style lettering at the top of the plaque. This reproduces the noble and prophetic statement telling of "ages of happiness for innumerable generations of human creatures" with which Livingstone greeted the delivery of the signed and perfected instrument into his hands.

An incident of the St. Louis Fair deserves mention as illustrating Bitter's ability to handle all classes and manners of men and to hold them to a common enterprise, not by autocratically breaking their wills, but, in the democratic way, by bringing them with patient argument to the perception of a higher purpose. Bitter had as a gift from nature a simple eloquence, very different from the trained declamation of the schools because merely a naïve outpouring of the honest convictions that filled his being. At the outset his audiences, usually the dinner-guests of the various societies to which he belonged, were often biased against him by the fact that he spoke English with a foreign accent, but the bias, according to overwhelming evidence, always melted swiftly before the hot torrent of his words. This man, who, the listeners seemed

to feel, spoke without studied grace, represented no petty view or selfish interest, but a cause that claimed them all.

At St. Louis it happened that a serious crisis was precipitated only a few weeks before the day set for the opening of the Fair by the Plasterers' Union threatening a strike if any but their own members were employed in placing and mending the statuary. The proceeding with regard to Bitter's division of the work was as follows: The models of the co-operating sculptors, cast in plaster, were assembled by the director in a former railroad round-house in Hoboken, New Jersey, and were there enlarged and completed in staff, the usual material for exposition purposes. As many of the figures were too large and unwieldy for shipment, they had to be done in sections, which sections, on their arrival in St. Louis, needed to be carefully fitted together and scrupulously repaired when injured. Here is where the Plasterers' Union stepped in. It declared emphatically through its walking delegates that the mending and joining were its particular work. The fact was, however, that the work was so involved and delicate that only trained artists could do it, and Bitter, maintaining his position as vigorously as the union bosses did theirs, refused to have his figures botched by inexpert fingers. Shrill wrangling led nowhere till Bitter had the happy thought of summoning the whole body of plasterers to a hall for a conference. There he laid the case before them in his usual fiery manner. He unfolded the artistic quality and national significance of the Exposition, and when the session closed the men themselves, yielding their selfish claims, abandoned their leaders and voted the concession that made possible the completion of the work according to Bitter's ideas.

CHAPTER VII

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PUBLIC COMMISSIONS

Ever since its creation in 1893 Bitter, a charter member, had been greatly interested in the National Sculpture Society. He hoped, as all the founders did, that, after the manner of an ancient guild, the Society would serve to protect the material interests of the members, but together with his fellows he also entertained the hope that the Society's collective efforts would prove far more effective than the scattered action of individuals in spreading the ideals of sculpture through the community. His gift of expression, as well as his readiness and ability to do administrative work, soon pushed him to the front. In 1899, as we have seen, he was among those intrusted by the Society with the decoration of the Dewey Arch; in 1900 he was, on the recommendation of the Society, raised to the post of director of sculpture at the Pan-American Exposition; and beginning with the year 1903 he was re-elected almost annually to the Society's governing board or council. It was only natural that, after having thus proved his capacity for leadership, he should have been elected to the presidency of the Society in 1906 in succession to Daniel Chester French, who had himself succeeded J. Q. A. Ward, first president and honored dean of the American wielders of the chisel.

The presidency was held by Bitter for two years (1906–8) and must have won the approval of the members, for, after a lapse of time, in 1914, he was again raised to the highest executive office and held it at his death.

The words and actions of Bitter as representative of the sculptors of America uniformly showed that he was concerned less with the privileges of the plastic profession than with its duties toward the public upon which it leaned for support. True, he followed in this a tradition of the Society already happily established under his predecessors in office. But he was aware that good traditions were not enough: the fight against egotism and decay must be unceasing.

Every society of craftsmen, and more particularly of artists, waxing fat and self-satisfied, runs the risk of becoming the tool of a governing clique. Bitter knew that only the steady admission of new blood, the policy of the Open Door, could keep the Sculpture Society from going stale and degenerating into a common nuisance. Therefore he advocated, not only the greatest liberality in electing meritorious young men to membership, but also the stirring program of keeping the Society serviceable to the public interest.

In these years of his executive connection with the National Sculpture Society he entered with steadily increasing fervor into the faith that sculpture, like every other art, is pre-eminently a social function. Not that the belief was the result of this particular executive experience, which came to him relatively late in life. The case was rather the other way round: he accepted official responsibilities because from his youth in Vienna he had been brought to think of sculpture in relation to the total activity of man and had resolutely rejected the notion, not unknown abroad and very current in America in what used to be called *fin-de-siècle* circles, that the fine arts were essentially an esoteric rite reserved to a few hollow-chested and consumptive aesthetes. Of course Bitter aroused opposition with his doctrine, especially when he used his official position as a sounding-board to fling his message afar, but it is certain that he commanded a substantial following in and out of the Society which heartily indorsed the program of keeping the sculptors of America united and uplifted by exercising, in effect, a public trust.

Inspired by these civic ideals, Bitter could not but welcome his appointment by the mayor of New York to the Municipal Art Commission. It occurred in January, 1912, and bound him to the city service for three years, that is, till close before his death. Owing to the prejudice against public control obtaining in our very individualistic society, the authority of the Art Commission was rather limited. The members, ten in number (including the mayor) and serving without pay, were authorized to pass on all public buildings and monuments to be erected on land belonging to the city of New York. While clothed with an unlimited veto power

against monstrous or feeble public projects, they were not permitted to exercise a constructive leadership in the spirit of the new art of town-planning. Bitter attended to his duties on the Art Commission with an assiduity and a devotion that won the respect of all his associates. Mr. George McAneny, former president of the Board of Aldermen and familiar through long association with Bitter's municipal activity, has made a generous avowal of the city's debt to its indefatigable servant, but he has also shown by quotations from Bitter's letters to him that the artist never ceased to lament the absence of a broad, flexible, and forward-looking program destined to serve as guide for a development of the city, frankly modern and yet aesthetically attractive.[1] Though the haphazard, hit-and-miss method, sanctified by age-long practice, was not abandoned either then or since, assuredly sometime, though most probably when it is too late, New York will regret its failure to exercise a proper foresight with regard to the artistic co-ordination of its squares, public buildings, monuments, parks, bridges, and systems of transportation.[2]

Even though New York was laggard, the fact that town-planning, the new science and art resulting from the inordinate industrial growth of cities, made rapid advances in America filled him with rejoicing. Occasional journeys had brought him into favorable acquaintance with some of the cities of the Middle West, and he came to think that among them, swelling with local pride and unburdened with the individualist traditions of the older cities of the coast, town-planning would first come into its own. He therefore

[1] Memorial address, May 5, 1915.

[2] An excerpt from a letter of the assistant secretary of the Art Commission, Mr. John Quincy Adams, may serve to complete the record of Bitter's activity in office: "During the three years of Mr. Bitter's term the Art Commission passed upon six hundred and thirteen separate matters, which was an average of two hundred and four a year. This of course meant a great deal of work for the members of the Commission and especially for Mr. Bitter, who was usually chairman of the committees to examine the models and locations of sculpture.

"Mr. Bitter was a very conscientious member of the Commission and performed his duties most faithfully. He gave a great deal of time to the work and I have known him to go out with a committee the entire day visiting proposed locations of fountains and monuments. . . . . His breadth of view, intelligence, and sound judgment were of great value to the Commission and to the city in the determination of many important questions that arose during his tenure of office."

greeted with satisfaction the commissions, all of them more or less of a public nature, which presently came to him from such centers as Madison, Cleveland, St. Louis, and Minneapolis. Of these commissions we shall presently speak, but the mere monuments, considered as works of art, do not tell the full story of his efforts. By means of his time generously given to official committees or private groups of public-spirited citizens, he spread, with an eloquence that never failed to fire his listeners, the new evangel of the City Beautiful, proclaiming it the cause of all artists, and certainly not least of his immediate brethren, the sculptors.

Largely because it was a public monument to be incorporated in the present and future life of New York, he threw such energy into the commission that came to him in 1908 to raise a memorial to Carl Schurz, soldier, statesman, writer, but, above all, fearless and upright citizen. In this case, however, Bitter felt also a peculiar private stimulus to give his best. Schurz, like Bitter himself had fled from unhappy conditions in the Old World and had found in America, not only physical well-being, but a political and social situation that appealed to his manhood and set his heart and mind astir. The plan and execution of the Schurz monument occupied him for five years and probably there was not a detail which in his usual tireless search for the most expressive contour he did not subject to half a score of changes.

The completed monument, superbly placed at the end of One Hundred and Sixteenth Street overlooking Morningside Park, shows the citizen-statesman in advanced but hale old age, dressed in the simple manner in which his neighbors met him of an afternoon when he sallied forth for exercise. His long overcoat falls in folds to his feet and he is pausing for a moment, hat in hand, to view the prospect before him. The note of extreme republican simplicity sounded by the posture and apparel is repeated by the expressive face, where, however, it mounts to an almost Roman severity, proclaiming more eloquently than words that patriotism is less a matter of rights than of the hardest kind of service.

Schurz himself, in bronze, stands upon a pedestal infolded by a semicircular stone bench inviting the passerby to rest and reflection.

On the face of the pedestal and at either end of the bench are allegorical scenes in relief, easily as interesting work as Bitter has done. In the central scene a youth vows his sword to the service of his country, while in the panel on the left the helmeted Republic angrily breaks the chains of the black slaves, and in the panel on the right Liberty with her torch lights the way for the citizens, young and old. There is a minimum of costume in these allegories, but such as exists has classical suggestions in keeping with the idealistic intent. The idealistic touch characterizes also the workmanship, which sharply accentuates the outlines and is content to handle the bodies in a succession of broad planes. In these panels, wrought in gray-black granite tough as iron, Bitter proved that his decorative sense had by no means declined, while the simplified technique, reducing weighty ideas to their plainest terms, showed that he had mastered a new language.

However, the panels of the Schurz monument were not the first essay in a new, simplified, and idealistic speech. A few years before, Bitter had been asked to decorate the doors of the First National Bank of Cleveland and on this occasion had departed—apparently for the first time—from his more or less naturalist past and achieved the largeness of style suited to express ideas and forms of eternal value. The Cleveland figures—men and women caryatids done, like the Schurz panels, in hard granite—should be compared with the four figures of the Arts wrought for the New York Metropolitan Museum ten years before. Both works represent architectural sculpture of a high order, but few observers will hesitate to attribute the grander effect as well as the completer union with façade and structure to the later contribution.

In Cleveland, too, he was asked to assist in the sculptural decoration of the new Court House. Here the nature of the task set him by his clients required a return to realistic portraiture. It would be wrong to convey the idea that he ever acquired an aversion for this kind of work; on the contrary, he liked it well wherever it was appropriate, but the fact remains that the realm of idealistic expression opened to him more and more as life advanced and that the novelty as well as the unexplored possibilities of the new style

lured his adventurous spirit. A very considerable proportion of his latest and ripest work, it will be found, served to express his new feeling and is unfolded in the terms of his new technique.

Bitter's contributions to the Cleveland Court House consist of two English jurists, Lord Somers and Lord Mansfield, in their official plumage of an almost inhuman magnificence, and of two famous but opposed interpreters of the spirit of the Young American Republic, Hamilton and Jefferson. The two Americans are seated on either side of the entrance to the Court House and the manuscripts and notes in the hand of each suggest that they are still defending the opinions that divided them when they were alive. A considerable section of American history is expressed by these two founders in perennial debate, one on the right, the other on the left, side of the portal to the House of Law.

Bitter could not approach the eighteenth century without realizing the elegance of dress and bearing associated with its fundamentally aristocratic life. Hamilton, as is natural, proclaims the gentleman more than Jefferson, but even the Virginia democrat does not deny his eighteenth-century lineage. It is the youthful and rebellious Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, who appears before us at Cleveland. Shortly after the completion of this work St. Louis demanded a Jefferson for the Jefferson Memorial Building erected to commemorate the great Fair of 1904. In the previous chapter this building has already received notice in connection with Bitter's tablet representing the Signing of the Purchase Treaty of 1803. On being asked to make a further contribution to the Memorial Building in the shape of a Jefferson, he resolved to work out a different concept from the one adopted for Cleveland and to present an older and more authoritative Jefferson, not Jefferson the revolutionary thinker, but Jefferson the chief executive of the United States. The new Jefferson—the President—sits firmly in his chair of office, searching the horizon with his eyes as if he were seeking to discern the far-off future of his people and his country.

To do justice to the spirit of Jefferson, Bitter read assiduously his works and letters. He came to love the somewhat erratic,

warm-hearted old democrat and was not disappointed when he received from his friend, Charles R. Crane, a third commission for a Jefferson to be placed on the grounds of the University of Virginia. Located at Charlottesville, almost in the shadow of Jefferson's famous residence at Monticello, the University of Virginia was the darling child of Jefferson's old age. Not only did the retired President, whose withdrawal from politics signified no abatement of interest in the young Republic, breathe the spirit of life into the Virginia venture, but he personally drew the original plan consisting of grounds, lecture halls, and dormitories. It is no small source of satisfaction to the admirer of Jefferson that the University of Virginia, which, as it stands today, constitutes one of the finest architectural groups up and down the face of our land, owes its effectiveness to those first sketches by the sage of Monticello. It was manifest to Bitter when he attacked the problem of Jefferson, the founder of the University of Virginia, that the founder was not identical with the other two Jeffersons already completed, the thinker and the President. He therefore created a third Jefferson, very like the St. Louis Jefferson to superficial inspection, but simpler, older, with more of the gravity and reverence of the patriarch. The unveiling, which he had planned to attend with a joyous company assembled by Mr. Crane, the donor, occurred three days after the fatal accident—without him.

Among the portrait commissions which came to Bitter in these days of his growing reputation two stand forth as being somewhat out of the ordinary. Instead of the succession of the famous dead, two well-known living Americans knocked at his studio door to have their form and features reproduced at the urgence of a large body of admiring followers. They were President Angell of the University of Michigan and President White of Cornell University. Bitter not only enjoyed the diversion of studying these portraits from the original instead of posing a hired model in more or less successful make-believe, but also delighted in the conversation of these rare and traveled gentlemen who in their long sittings recounted in pointed anecdote or sage reflection the experiences of a lifetime of public service glowing with movement and color.

The bronze President Angell, in relief, adorns the entrance to the great assembly hall of the University of Michigan; President White, a full bronze figure, is seated under the trees on the Cornell grounds silently reviewing, as it were, the student generations filing by.

Turning again to the work done by Bitter in the idealistic manner which is so important a feature of the last stage of his development, we cannot afford to neglect his labors for the state of Wisconsin. At Madison, the capital, a new state building was erected and of its four pediments two were assigned to Bitter; to him also were intrusted the symbolic groups high up at the base of the central dome. These groups, four in number and representing, respectively, Abundance, Strength, Knowledge, and Faith, exhibit that generalized and suave treatment of the human form which we call classical. Though the groups are effective compositions, it would be a tedious task to attempt to transpose them into words. An undoubted drawback, whether due to the miscalculation of the sculptor or of the architect, is that the groups are raised to an elevation which removes them from the easy inspection of anyone not endowed with telescopic vision.

This drawback in no way attaches to the two pediments. They have been much admired, more particularly the one representing the state of Wisconsin exultantly displaying to the world the wealth of her natural resources. It would be difficult to name a monumental composition of recent years which is more compact or better balanced. Let us remind ourselves that the pediment, considered as a form of art, presents a number of special difficulties. In this pediment of Bitter's they are solved almost playfully, the composition tapering off, naturally and gracefully, from the erect, majestic female figure of Wisconsin in the center to the fishers and hunters reclining at the angles. A horse and an ox, powerfully modeled in simple planes, together with a ram, a fawn, a dog, and a badger—this last constituting the loved totem of the state—are felicitously distributed among the harvesters and hunters to call to mind that a state is not only a congregation of men and women, but a complex of woods, fields, streams, and animals. A spirit

of joyousness envelops the pediment from end to end, supplying the final touch which welds it into unity.

When Bitter was asked to raise a monument to Thomas Lowry, leading citizen of Minneapolis in his day and generation, he discovered once more that the sentiment in favor of a portrait-statue is deep-rooted with the average person. The sculptor had to agree to represent Lowry in his exact human counterfeit, but as a sort of salve to his disappointment he had conceded to him, to treat as he pleased, a site consisting of a triangular plot of ground created by the intersection of two city streets.

The problem was a difficult one, especially the embarrassing figure of the tall, lanky Minneapolis pioneer, whom his admiring fellow-citizens clamored to see as they had known him, clothed in the impeccable trousers and frock coat of bourgeois respectability. It would be useless to pretend that Thomas Lowry, as he appears in bronze, is, taken by himself, picturesque in any way. But the triangular space put at the artist's disposal was so intelligently used to modify the plebeian literalness of the statue that the total effect is entirely different from that produced by the average bronze patriot who sounds a humorous or cacophonous note along our city thoroughfares. The notable thing was that Bitter, while doing a portrait-statue with his usual whole-hearted sincerity, concerned himself chiefly with the monumental ensemble and the necessity of fitting it harmoniously into the city's established physiognomy. His performance therefore should be weighed as evidence regarding his skill as a town-planner, and such being the case, the statue, which may or may not arouse enthusiasm on realistic grounds, reduces itself to a detail in an effective urban composition.

Turning to this composition, we note that before the bronze citizen, the necessary kernel of the plan, spreads a triangular garden-plot and that behind the statue, shutting it off from an apartment house, which, unless concealed, would have spelt ruin, rises a tall marble screen in three sections. In the two end sections of the screen are allegorical figures intended to recall the civic virtues of the man upon the pedestal, and carried out in an impressive architectural manner. The original plan was that the allegorical

figures, a crouching man and woman, representing respectively Civic Strength and Civic Fruitfulness, should be shown as reliefs. As the reliefs faced north, however, and would be uninteresting in the even light in which they would be seen, Bitter hit on the not often used device of perforating the marble, thus giving his figures an unusually striking silhouette. The matter deserves mention as showing his ready ingenuity in meeting the various difficulties certain to arise with every new task of the sculptor.

In this period of the artist's development fell a new National Exposition planned to celebrate the completion by our government of our greatest national venture to the present day, the Panama Canal. The honor of harboring the Fair was very properly conceded to San Francisco, and Bitter was once more called to serve as director of sculpture. Loaded with commissions, evidence of his growing favor, he was unable to accept. It is a sign of the authority he enjoyed on the score of his previous successes at Buffalo and St. Louis that pressure was so persistently brought from many sides that he at length withdrew his refusal. But while agreeing to draw the plans and exercise a general supervision, he insisted that the labor on the ground be intrusted to his friend, A. Stirling Calder. His association with the Panama-Pacific Exposition of 1915 therefore lacks the intimacy of his service with the two older ventures. The general sculptural scheme was his and doubtless, too, we may attribute to his spirit the harmonious co-operation of so many different artists. But he was only occasionally on the spot at San Francisco and made no personal contribution to the Exposition statuary. Since the story gained credence that he was fabulously rewarded for his general superintendence, it is proper to remark that he gave his services for nothing. Only for the general plan, involving a not inconsiderable personal expense, did he accept remuneration.

While the Panama-Pacific Exposition does not loom large in the history of Karl Bitter, it is interesting to note that in the last year of his life he was as much a rallying-point for American sculptors as he had ever been and that he continued to exercise a natural leadership in all enterprises calling for a concerted artistic effort.

CHAPTER VIII

FINALE: THE MAN AND HIS WORK

Through his energy and administrative talent as well as through his eagerness to participate in the affairs of city and state, Bitter figured in no inconsiderable manner in the public life of America in his day. The previous chapters have recorded his share in various activities and enterprises, professional, municipal, and national, and have emphasized his faith that all the arts, and therefore also sculpture, have their final justification in social service. While, in Bitter's view, the artist's immediate concern was to enhance man's environment by adding beauty to utility—and in this sense all craftsmen alike are or should be artists—it was, according to him, the special prerogative of the followers of what are called the Fine Arts to exercise besides a spiritual function, inasmuch as the Arts and, together with them, the Sciences must shape the ideals by which alone man can be brought to a consciousness of his high destiny and to the achievement of a noble civilization.

Bitter was the more profoundly impressed with this mission of the Arts by virtue of the attempts, constantly renewed, to preach the social detachment of the artist under the confusing battle-cry of art for art's sake. When, therefore, he was invited, in the last year of his life, to deliver a lecture on sculpture in an art series arranged by the Architectural League of New York, he accepted with alacrity. The lecture, he reflected, would have the advantage, not only of helping him crystallize his own ideas, but also of presenting them in concise form to a professional and influential public. Delivered in 1914, the lecture exists unfortunately only in manuscript. It is to be regretted that it has never been published, especially in view of the fact that, although we boast an abundance of books on sculpture by critics and amateurs, we have very few by practicing sculptors with a record of successful work in their day.

The lecture, in the main, is technical, and offers a business-like, professional explanation, which eschews every hackneyed, dilettante phrase, of the way in which the production of statuary was accomplished in the past epochs of European art. No reader but will find it full of marrow and strikingly illuminative of many a dark, historical corner. But the theme in which the lecturer particularly delights and which he weaves, like a wreath, through the whole exposition is that in the great periods of the past the sculptor was also architect, engineer, bronze-founder, and not infrequently a public official to boot—that is, he was engaged in a direct, practical manner on all the problems of his time, artistic and social, and stood firmly rooted in reality. The present-day sculptor, having little commerce with architects and they as little with him, modeling exclusively in clay and insufficiently acquainted with the technique of the stonecutter and the bronze-founder, and, finally, called on to make statues or statuettes chiefly for the drawing-rooms and country houses of wealthy connoisseurs—this specialized sculptor has, in too many cases, become hopelessly divorced from the great, pulsing life of his time. That he reassociate himself with the body politic, that he become practical again in the most fruitful sense of the word, is the culminating demand of this spirited and informing essay.

It is apparent that such a lecture, expressive though it be of a practical bent and a grinding shop-experience, could not have been written if Bitter had not commanded the history of his art and been an earnest lover of books. And such indeed was the case. He had acquired the reading habit far back in his academy days, never to lose it while he lived. The result was that, as his material means increased, he collected a considerable library, which, while boasting the usual classics of general literature, confessed a specialist's interest in the field of art. In this department he bought almost lavishly, not only histories and biographies, but more particularly photographs, of which his collection rivaled that of many an art school. We are all aware that artists are often unconcerned with books and that sometimes they are ignorant and contemptuous of the past of even their own immediate field. Though regrettable,

this state of things is perhaps inevitable since the artist is, after all, primarily a craftsman and not a bookworm. But a new doctrine, rather commonly held by the rising generation, goes a step farther and affirms that a creative artist must deliberately avoid the past in order not to be brought under the tyranny of the dead masters. For this teaching Bitter entertained nothing but scorn, holding that it was born of fear and indolence. His steady practice was to read as much as his time allowed in the confident hope of enriching his outlook and broadening his personality. And without question he succeeded in this purpose, for, as we should not fail to note, since it is the nub of the issue, the art knowledge he acquired was a living thing, cherished not for its own sake, but because it threw a penetrating light on the particular problems which the artists of his day and generation had to face. These problems, however, he never doubted constituted the real concern of the living sculptor and therefore they remained the shining central mark of all his thought and study.

Two other fields of Bitter's reading deserve a word. One was American history. His passion for his adopted country, as well as the great public tasks which came to him, easily explains this preference. We have already noted that in connection with his various Jeffersons he dove deep into the records, preferably the actual words, of the great democrat. Hamilton, too, who, by the way, was killed in his famous duel with Burr at a point only a few steps below Bitter's Weehawken home, was read assiduously by him before he put to paper the first rapid sketch for the Cleveland statue. In connection with each of the great fairs, but especially on the occasion of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, he did a considerable amount of reading having to do with the general development of America, and the writer remembers with pleasure how vivaciously, in connection with the diplomatic history of the Franco-American Treaty of 1803, he rode into the lists for Livingstone, whose merit in the matter of the Louisiana acquisition he held to have been obscured by the historians. One of the books with which he lived closely before he drew even a line of his plans for the Purchase Exposition was Roosevelt's *Winning of the West.*

It is not too much to say that through Bitter's sympathetic mediation something of the spirit of daring of the famous rough-rider gained plastic expression on the St. Louis Fair grounds.

The second field of Bitter's reading, which under no circumstances may be omitted from consideration, was, using the term untechnically, philosophy. If it was a man's part to know his country, it was, according to him, no less a man's part to know something of nature and the universe of the sun and stars. Bitter shared with every considerable person that has ever lived the desire to obtain a satisfactory point of view from which to envisage the assembled data of experience. Early in life he had rejected the viewpoint of revealed religion—the reader may remember his naïve revolt against the Catholic church—and had gradually drifted into the scientific-skeptical currents dominant in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But drifting does not do justice to his attitude, for he was by no means content to repeat, parrot-like, the famous scientific passwords of the day. He wished to master for himself the chief evidence in favor of the new doctrine of evolution and became an assiduous reader of books, not too technical, written to propound, from the angle of modern learning, the story of this earth of ours and of the manifold life upon it. His interest, for instance, in the great ascending stages of sea life and land life or in the evolution of the horse from an animal no bigger than a dog was perennial. Part of this interest was no doubt merely an uncommon delight in information, but inevitably, with his artist's love of unity, he tried to fit his bits of knowledge into a co-ordinated scheme. It was at this point that he invaded what, unconventionally speaking, we may call the realm of philosophy, and came upon God, Maker of heaven and earth. Of course the God disclosed to his manhood search was not the deity of the Catholic catechism, rejected in his youth, nor the deity of any other Christian sect; it was the God of science, the God who is Nature, Life, Eternity.

Attempting to put the living faith of Bitter's ripened manhood into a word, we may say that he was an affirming evolutionist, a much rarer type unfortunately than the evolutionist who exhausts

himself in negation. His joyous and instinctive sense of an unseen unity transcending all appearance of division led him finally to a definite step. He declared himself a monist and joined the League of Monists, a society the members of which profess a glad, constructive faith in man and nature and which is established in all countries, though its main seat and chief following are in Germany. Perhaps no reading of his last years gave him so much comfort and strong uplift as the publications, in the nature of essays and lay sermons, of this society. Some of the monist pamphlets were always on the table at the head of his bed, and night after night he would dismiss the troubles of the day and bid his spirit join the harmonious march of nature by lighting his lamp and reading himself to sleep with his eyes glued to a monist dream of progress and fellowship.

A man whose thoughts ranged so far afield was of course an eager traveler. Bitter came to know America well, especially the West, some of its more spectacular wonders, like the Sequoia forests, stirring him to descriptions on return to his fireside that the hearers will never forget. But Europe, and more particularly Austria, the well-beloved though unkind mother, were not forgotten. On several early trans-Atlantic visits he was obliged to skirt his native land because, as we know, in deserting from the army he had been guilty of what, in the eyes of the law, was a felony. In 1909 he was rejoiced by the news that, in consequence of the vigorous solicitation of his Viennese friends, a pardon had been extended to him by Emperor Francis Joseph. Accordingly, in the summer of 1910, with his wife and three children as lively and convincing witnesses of his new existence, he revisited the scenes of his youth. His father had died the year before, but his mother and two brothers made him welcome in the city of his birth, and many a faithful old friend came to shake him by the hand. Apart from the quiet spiritual satisfaction of rewelding the broken pieces of his life, the journey to Vienna yielded as chief fruit the certain knowledge that he was a deracinated European and belonged with every corpuscle of his blood and every energy of his spirit to the land of his adoption.

Travel in America and Europe was relished as vacation sightseeing, but, enjoyable as it might be, it always failed in the long run to compare with the delight that came to him from his summer home in the wilds. We have seen how, after a few years of crowded New York, he had built his house and workshop off the beaten metropolitan track on the Weehawken cliffs. A charming and unique retreat, it yet was not untrammeled out-of-doors. This Bitter, lover of nature, sought by settling on an island in Racquette Lake, one of the most untamed regions of the Adirondacks. Beginning in 1903 he migrated thither with his growing family every year with the single exception of the Viennese summer mentioned above. On the island which he picked for settlement he acquired an existent camp, embracing a small cabin and a boathouse. The island, connected by tradition with an Indian chief, Oteetiwi by name, was an impenetrable forest except for the half-acre or so of clearing at the point where the camp lay. Around the little settlement the forest, mixed of pine and beech, wove its verdant screen with such luxuriance that the fisherman or sailor gliding by in his boat noticed no signs of a human habitation until he was within stone's throw of the shore.

It was a wildwood Eden, but even Eden, as we know, has its perils and disturbances. One hapless Fourth of July evening the camp caught fire, just how was never known, and went up in smoke with such amazing rapidity that the sleeping children were barely snatched from the jaws of death. It was not the owner's way to be dismayed by the sudden ruin. When the morning's sun arose he rolled up his sleeves for a fresh start and began that very day a new cabin on the site of the old. The cabin done, he added a kitchen, a boathouse, and finally a studio, raising them, be it observed, with his own hand with the help of at most a workman or two picked up in the neighboring lumber-camps. Of course he did not do it all in the first summer of the fire nor in the summer after that. He went his own deliberate gait, but the fact remains that he built his home in the woods, laboring with the utmost exhilaration through many weeks of each summer, much like an early pioneer pushing the edge of civilization forward into the

kingdom of the Red man. And occasionally, in order to vary the proceeding, he dropped the workman's ax or mason's trowel and took to building beds, chairs, and other household furniture out of the raw timber at his door.

When after many summers of this sort of labor the Racquette Lake camp was done, it was as unique in its way as the suburban home at Weehawken. Both were not only achievements of his brain, but also, particularly the summer camp, products of his hands. It may be doubted whether in these days of specialization an artist often resides in a house raised by himself acting in the several capacities of architect, mason, carpenter, and painter. The handmade camp was, to say the least, an evidence of Bitter's sincere love of tools, but it was also the living proof that he not only preached but practiced his belief in the artist's need of coming to actual grips with life.

The man we have been describing was, as he neared the end of the forties, a ripened personality confirmed in a philosophy of life which he had elaborated from an unusually rich and varied experience. Since all his manhood works speak of this maturity, we have already discovered it in the great public commissions discussed in the previous chapter. But a less monumental and more intimate kind of work, with traces of a very personal confession, remains to be treated. Sculpture—heaven be praised!—is not all of one kind, and an artist who trusts his taste discovers that there are occasions for being frankly subjective, as there are other occasions for being resolutely detached and unmoved. A group of Bitter's works of the last period remaining to be discussed all sound unmistakably the warm, personal note. Pre-eminent among them are the Rockefeller Fountain and the Prehn and Kasson memorials.

The Rockefeller Fountain at Pocantico Hills, showing a naked goose-girl who has laughingly snatched a young goose from its mother, is one of Bitter's best tributes to the joy of living. To deal with the riddle of existence, to cherish the philosophic attitude, does not at all mean that one must surrender the viewpoint of youth, and to throw but a single glance at the Rockefeller Fountain with its merry confusion of geese and girl is to receive

the assurance that the author had a rich fund of childlike, natural gaiety.

In sharp contrast with this gaiety, but, however solemn, born of the identical love of life, are the Prehn and Kasson memorials. The former was raised to three little children who died too soon. It stands in the cemetery of Passaic, New Jersey, and consists of a circular tabernacle (of which Henry Bacon was the architect) constructed somewhat in the manner of the famous choregic monument of Lysicrates. The sculptor contributed, in high relief, a procession of children—some gay, some sorrowful, but all of them delightfully childlike, who carry a festoon of leaves as they move circle-wise along the outer surface of the monument. Within the tabernacle he put as single occupant the little bronze figure of a girl, gazing in mixed astonishment and dismay at the faded flowers in her hands. Death in childhood, death that comes to interrupt play and laughter, can hardly be given a more poignant expression.

The Kasson Memorial shows a kneeling woman and is in marble and life-size. The woman's soul is releasing itself from the confining flesh and at the very acme of the struggle hears a voice out of the Dark bringing a message of good cheer. The figure, fairly quivering with the delicate beauty of swaying body and raised arms, strangely touches the imagination with its portraiture of human fears suddenly hushed in the presence of Eternity.

In the winter of 1914–15, destined to prove the last of his life, Bitter worked chiefly on two projects, the Plaza figure and the Depew Fountain. Both were close to his heart, first, because they stimulated his newer idealistic expression, and, secondly, because they were intended to mark important city foci and be merged in the permanent life of their respective communities. The Depew Fountain, ordered by Indianapolis, never got beyond the first plastalina sketch. But what there is of it shows a fairy or deity of some sort set high on a pillar and weaving with lifted arms an enchantment which, falling upon a group of boys and girls of various ages, moves them to clasp hands and join in a dance of bewitching abandon and exuberance. The fountain was to be erected in a city park, appointed playground of the young as well

as the chosen habitation of the goddess Spring on her annual visit to our urban centers, and Youth and Spring are the twin genii who have set their seal on this attractive sketch. After the artist's death, the committee of Indianapolis citizens in charge of the project arranged to have the model carried to completion by A. Stirling Calder. Thus Indianapolis will have the fountain it desired, but it will in the main be looked upon, and very properly, as Mr. Calder's work.

The Plaza, gateway to New York's great Central Park, had always struck Bitter, during his many years of residence in the city, as falling short of the monumental character which might be properly expected of it. He was therefore pleased to hear that a New York citizen, Joseph Pulitzer, had left money for a fountain to be erected on the Plaza, and was positively delighted when the architect to whom the fountain was intrusted asked him to do the single figure which was to unify and crown the enterprise. He had some years before, in 1909 to be exact, on his children arriving at the age for school, regretfully consented to move with his family across the river to New York. While renting the house and garden, he retained the spacious Weehawken workshop, dividing his time between it and a smaller studio attached to his apartment in New York. Desiring now to concentrate his undivided attention on the Plaza figure, he fitted out rough sleeping-quarters at the studio where, alone except for a single assistant, he could pass his days and nights unreached and uninterrupted by the worries of the day.

Thus centered on himself, he made rapid headway with his figure. When spring came—and it came early in the year 1915, bringing a long succession of dazzling days—he was enabled to swing his model onto the terrace outside the studio overlooking river and city and to work in the open air. As Easter approached he had a first experimental cast made and permitted himself to be unusually exultant over it, for he felt that, apart from minor changes, he had his conception in hand.

The Plaza figure represents a nude woman standing with left foot somewhat raised and body turned to the left as she makes ready with quiet deliberation to scatter a basket of fruits and

flowers. The atmosphere of the figure is classic in the sense that while there is movement, the movement is neither instantaneous nor violent, and in the further sense that while there is realism, that is, a close adherence to the forms of nature, we are not invited to gaze at a particular, individualized woman but at generic woman, the eternal woman-mold. That is the reason why the spectator catching the classic feeling will be inclined to discover in the Plaza figure a nymph or goddess of some sort, perhaps Pomona, who came to scatter the earth with fruits, though the hair, treated in wavy lines and rimmed with crinkles like sea-shells, rather serves to turn the fancy toward some spirit of the water. The name is of course of no importance, and nothing matters but beauty and fitness, the effects the artist aimed at. And that his figure is, ideally considered, appropriate to a fountain is communicated at a flash, although, to do justice to the artist, it must emphatically be stated that the foundations of the particular fountain for which it was designed had only been begun at Bitter's death and that he never saw the structure which now adorns the Plaza. Who knows what changes he would have effected in his figure, if he had lived to swing his plaster model into place and study it in its appointed setting? Who knows what changes he would have induced the architect to make? At any rate when, a year after Bitter's death, the figure, faithfully completed in the sculptor's spirit by his friend, Isidore Konti, was unveiled, fountain and figure sounded something less than a full, blended chord. That will remain a matter for regret only partially canceled by the beauty of the figure taken by itself, a beauty victoriously asserted by the half-turned body, the sloping shoulders, and the long, graceful arms.

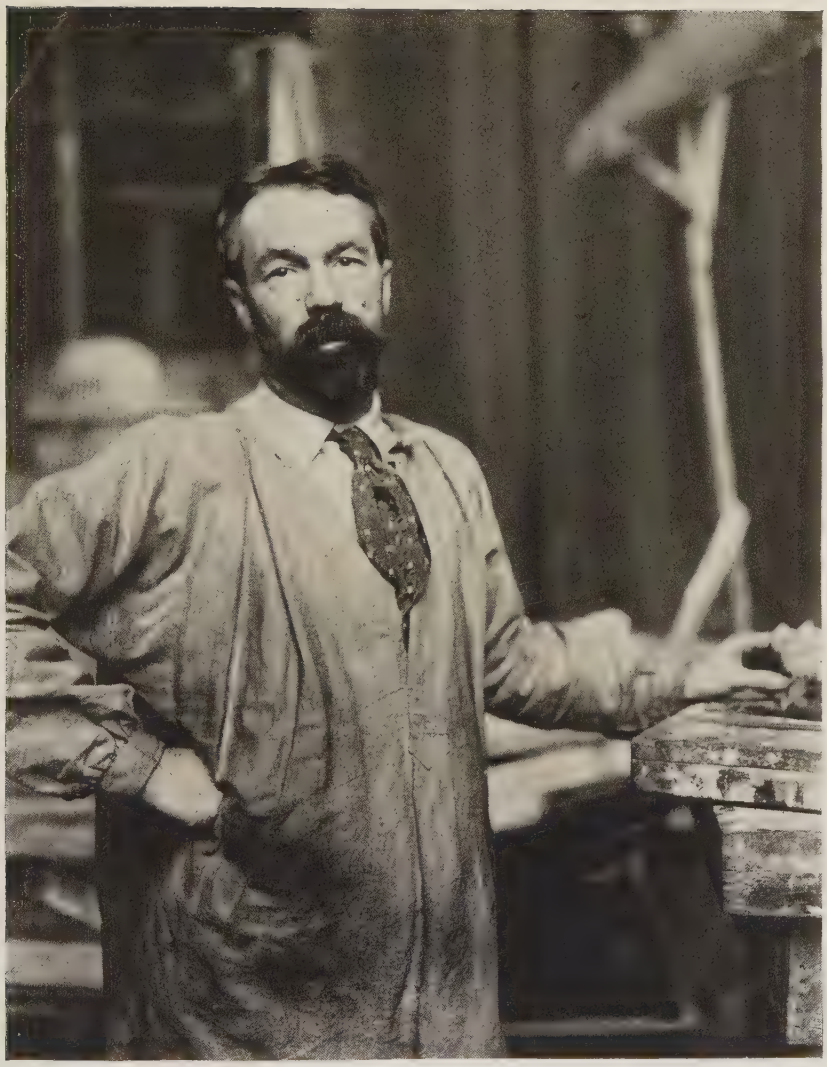
On April 9, having worked all day in the sun and air with the river rolling by under his feet, he elatedly telephoned his wife at New York that he was as good as done with his last touches on the plaster model and that he must terminate his long withdrawal from his family with a little celebration. If Fate, as some of the Greek poets hold, is often moved to pity ere it strikes and prepares its victim for the journey he must go with a whispered warning, on this occasion it is certain the Dread Power stood aside, voiceless

and inscrutable. No palest shadow of approaching death fell upon Bitter, who was in one of his most expansive moods. He took his wife to the opera and between acts spoke only of the future, like one for whom the world is only just beginning to disclose its wonders. Then, the opera over, husband and wife stepped across Broadway to take the street car, when suddenly an automobile, running amuck in the crowd, swooped down on them. They had just time to exchange a glance. The next moment, as his wife, knocked over, fell safely between the wheels, the wildly careering machine went over his body.

To us mortals, lured by the dream of immortality but not persuaded by it, the grim Reaper with the scythe is never a welcome guest, not even when he comes in the fulness of the harvest, but when he descends suddenly out of Nowhere reaping the tender laughing girl or the strong man at his work, he strikes white terror into our souls by the violence and stark unreason of his act. It is this feeling —the needlessness and pity of the thing—that rules our mind in contemplating the sudden cutting off of Karl Bitter at the height of his powers. But let us make no mistake. While what he had accomplished was in a sense only an earnest of vastly greater things to follow, he had done what he had done—a strong man's work in his allotted hour. The evidence of that work survives him and remains for us contemporaries to see and to enjoy, but not to judge in any final way. That will be the task of those who come after us and who will perform it in the even and impartial light of Time.

But what we of his own generation, and we alone, are able to speak of with authority is the man who has passed from mortal sight forever. If this narrative has not been wholly futile, it must have made clear that the most constant effort of his being was expended in the direction of his own self-realization. His deep-down conviction was that only a rich personality could effect a worth-while expression in the materials of his art. This lifelong struggle with himself accounts for the uninterrupted growth which, as one looks backward over his career, stands out as the distinctive mark of both his personality and his art and which explains why,

everywhere and throughout, life and work are of one piece. He was a faithful friend, a devoted husband and father, and a loyal and active citizen. Even people who met him only casually quickly and instinctively responded to the vigor of his mind and the candor of his spirit, and those who saw him day after day, from his lovers at the fireside to the humblest employee of shop and house, never felt other than that he was a tower of strength and the soul of honor. Of his many works the most winning and consummate, as also—if our human hopes be indeed more than such stuff as dreams are made of—the most permanent, was himself.



2. PORTRAIT OF KARL BITTER (1907)

3. COMPETITION PANEL FOR THE TRINITY GATES, LOWER BROADWAY, NEW YORK CITY

4. TRINITY GATE, LOWER BROADWAY, NEW YORK CITY

5. PEDIMENT, PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD STATION, PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

6. ANDIRON, BILTMORE, NORTH CAROLINA

7. FOUNTAIN, BILTMORE, NORTH CAROLINA

8. DR. PEPPER, PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

9. SCULPTURE (ONE OF FOUR FIGURES), METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK CITY

10. DEWEY ARCH, BATTLE GROUP

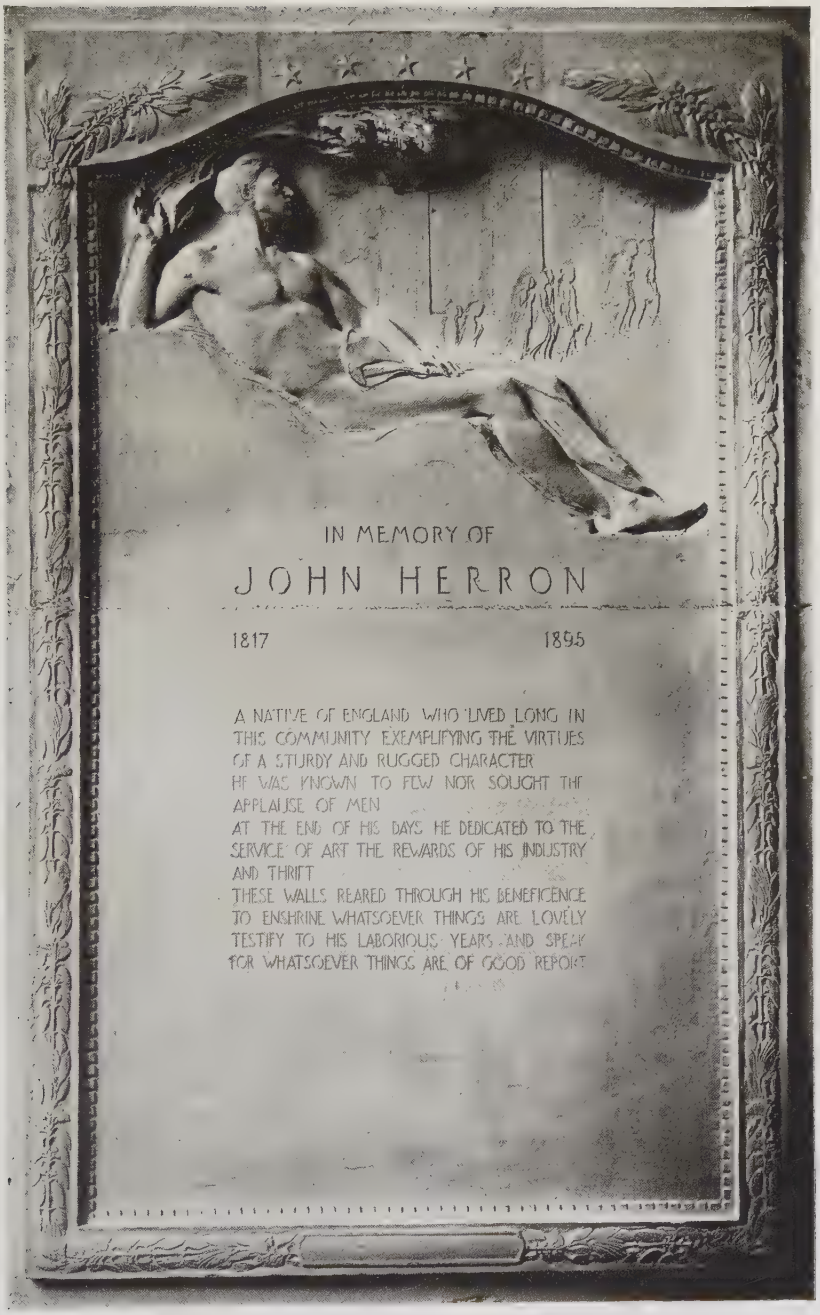
11. STANDARD-BEARER, PAN-AMERICAN EXPOSITION, BUFFALO, NEW YORK

12. THANATOS, HUBBARD MEMORIAL, MONTPELIER, VERMONT

13. VILLARD MEMORIAL, SLEEPY HOLLOW, NEW YORK

14. DETAIL OF VILLARD MEMORIAL

15. OGDEN TABLET, NEW YORK CITY


IN MEMORY OF
JOHN HERRON
1817
1895
A NATIVE OF ENGLAND WHO LIVED LONG IN
THIS COMMUNITY EXEMPLIFYING THE VIRTUES
OF A STURDY AND RUGGED CHARACTER
HE WAS KNOWN TO FEW NOR SOUGHT THE
APPLAUSE OF MEN
AT THE END OF HIS DAYS HE DEDICATED TO THE
SERVICE OF ART THE REWARDS OF HIS INDUSTRY
AND THRIFT
THESE WALLS REARED THROUGH HIS BENEFICENCE
TO ENSHRINE WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE LOVELY
TESTIFY TO HIS LABORIOUS YEARS AND SPEAK
FOR WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE OF GOOD REPORT

16. HERRON TABLET, ART INSTITUTE, INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

17. FOUNTAIN, DAYTON, OHIO

18. PORTRAIT GROUP, MRS. C. R. CRANE AND BOY

19. PORTRAIT BUST OF MRS. EDWIN EMERSON

20. LOUISIANA PURCHASE GROUP, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

21. GENERAL SIGEL, RIVERSIDE DRIVE, NEW YORK CITY

22 HEAD OF CARL SCHURZ

23. SCHURZ MONUMENT, MORNINGSIDE PARK, NEW YORK CITY

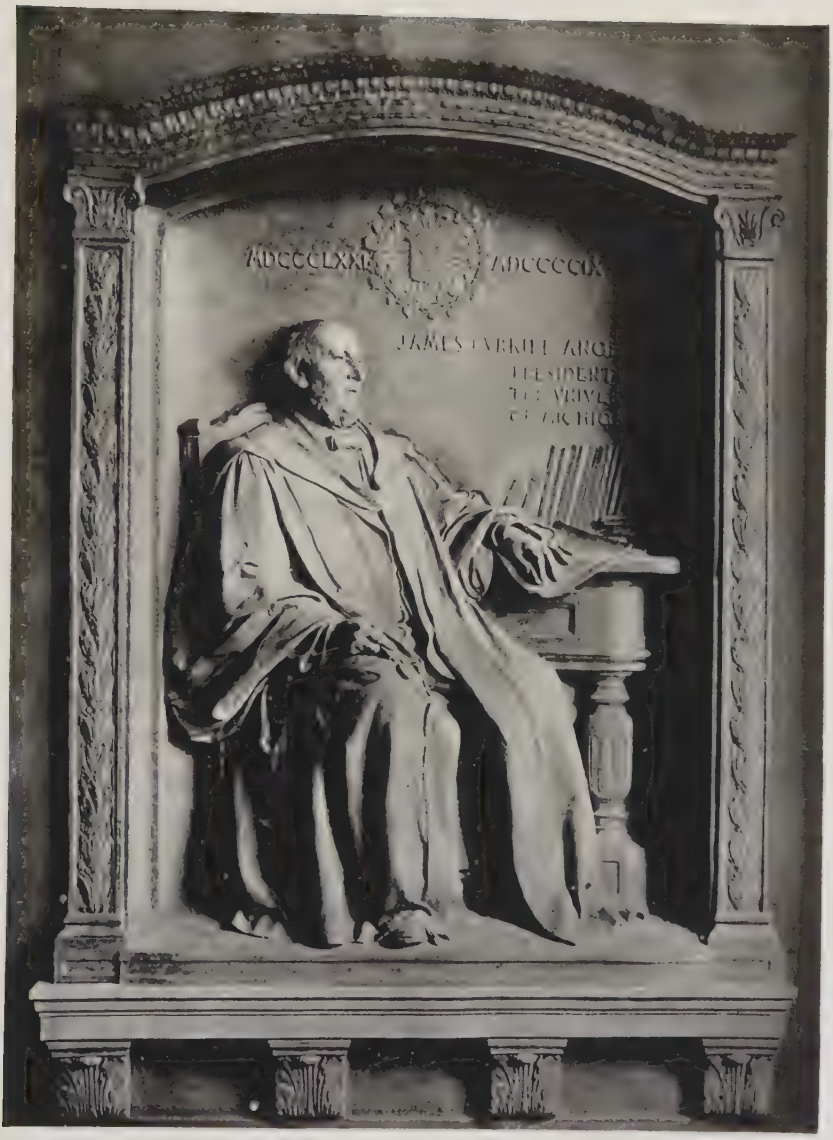
24. SCHURZ PANEL

25. SCHURZ PANEL

26. CARYATIDS, FIRST NATIONAL BANK, CLEVELAND OHIO

27. ALEXANDER HAMILTON, COURT HOUSE, CLEVELAND, OHIO

28. THOMAS JEFFERSON, UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA



29. DR. ANGELL MEMORIAL, ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

30. PEDIMENT, CAPITOL AT MADISON, WISCONSIN

31. DETAIL OF LOWRY MONUMENT, MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

32. DIANA, STATUETTE IN BRONZE

33. PREHN MEMORIAL, PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY

34. DETAIL OF PREHN MEMORIAL

35. KASSON MEMORIAL, UTICA, NEW YORK

36. FOUNTAIN FOR THE GARDENS OF JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER, JR., POCANTICO HILLS, NEW YORK

37. SKETCH FOR THE DEPEW FOUNTAIN, INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

38. FIGURE (UNFINISHED) FOR THE PLAZA FOUNTAIN, NEW YORK CITY

39. PEN DRAWING

40. PEN DRAWING

41. HOUSE AT WEEHAWKEN (STUDIO BUILDING CONCEALED BEHIND THE HOUSE)

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